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WHAT PERSPECTIVES FOR BRICS& NAM URBAN STRATEGIES?

BRICS Evolution

The war events of 2022 undoubtedly triggered a profound change in the international geo-political scenario still from the uncertain developments of the coming months.

In this new context, which is changing balances based on rules and institutions dating back to over 75 years ago at the end of the Second World War, imposed by the dominant powers, a new role and greater space are acquired by the groupings of emerging countries that are more representative of the new reality global like BRICS and movements like NAM. After many years of stagnation, which had led one to think and a progressive decline, we are witnessing a revitalization of the BRICS and its enlargement which has been hoped for for years, in fact during 2022, in various meetings and in the last Summit, membership was started of Algeria, Argentina, and Iran to which in the coming months that of Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt, who since some time have expressed their intention to join the group. Indonesia, which hosted the G20 summit in November, also expressed interest in this direction, albeit without specifying actions and dates, being torn between its other ASEAN participations in many bilateral agreements, including China itself. Other potential candidacy or agreement mentioned is with SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) member countries.

NAM Revival

For the same reasons, the movement of non-aligned countries is regaining its political relevance after appearing to be on the verge of extinction in recent decades and with an insignificant weight on the world stage. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), born in 1961 in Belgrade, is a forum of 120 countries that are not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc. After the United Nations, it is the largest grouping of states worldwide and they comprise 55% of the world's population.

The Ukrainian crisis is dividing the world into two camps and therefore represents a unique opportunity for its repositioning in favor of peace and multilateralism. The NAM countries therefore have to find a new role in order not to find themselves sandwiched between two blocs. It is significant that in the March 2022 UN resolution condemning Russia. of the 35 countries that abstained as many as 28 were NAM countries; and the group chairman said neutrality was key issue. This was a first act of rebirth of the Non-Aligned to find a special space outside the conflict that could accommodate all those who opt for abstention.

Observations

A convergence and potential greater synergy for common initiatives and actions in the near future between the two groupings is evident, with similar global development objectives according to new schemes of greater representation of emerging and non-aligned countries in a renewed global geo-

political framework. If we consider the overall data of population, domestic product, land area and available resources, the progressive adhesion of these countries to a single structure would mean two-thirds of humanity, which no longer accepts the current obsolete international schemes and rules. One of the fields for such possible cooperation are the complex urban development issues, considering that the biggest agglomerations are located in the nations belonging to both groupings. The BRICS countries in fact were not alone in their concern over the accelerating speed of urbanization. Till now this problematic has not been faced adequately and has been developing following western imposed models and submitted to the economic interests. In fact, despite that the COVID 19 pandemic has highlighted the negative impacts of concentration in metropolitan areas and that a reflection on the settlement model is needed, the general interest continues to be focused on strictly urban issues with almost no attention on the increased urban-rural imbalances further. In fact, with some recent exceptions, none of the international agencies or governmental bodies have dealt with this issue in depth. It is in recent months that even China, which until recently was the promoter of accelerated urbanization policies, is partially reconsidering them in the light of the growing gap in the standard of living between urban and rural areas and the demographic decline, more marked in the cities (source). The heavy restrictions, which have affected millions of residents in large cities, with the consequent drop in productive activities and consequent decrease in GDP, and social discontent, are starting an overall reflection, not only in terms of settlement location, but also based on values not strictly cheap. This is just one example of a desired global turning point that affects many of the economic models and interests, linked to urbanization, more consolidated in industrialized countries for which a change can take place more easily in emerging countries, including the BRICs and the NAMs. It is precisely in them that the greatest number of new large megalopolises is developing, with their share of precarious and informal settlements, therefore where it is advisable to act more promptly. Despite the growing problems of these urban concentrations, little or nothing has been done strategically to mitigate the negative effects, in some cases by creating other mega cities or alternative projects! So the question is whether the principles, declarations and objectives promoted by the BRICS & NAM on equal collective well-being, sustainable development, etc, can have a real application in reducing urban-rural imbalances and mitigating the current negative impacts of urbanisation.

BRICS & Urban Development

So far issues related to urbanization have long been among the topics that the BRICS countries have addressed starting from March 2012 when the Delhi Summit also agreed that the BRICS agenda should contain the sub-theme of sustainable urbanization. The following United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development of Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, provided a solid basis for the focus areas, as the resolutions of the Conference on “*Sustainable Cities And Human Settlements*” gave a clear picture of challenges faced by cities as a result of growing urbanization. But after this initial intense activity in recent years the attention has been decreasing. In fact, from reading the events and meetings that are held in the individual member countries every year and whose results are summarized in the points of the subsequent Summit declarations, it can be seen that this topic is reported with a few generic sentences between the last paragraphs. If the initial forums starting from the first (2012 Delhi) had a wide resonance and visibility, with specific declarations on urban development and urban-rural relations as in the 2nd Forum (2013 Durban) and on Urban Transition in BRICS in the 3rd (2016 India) the relevance has progressively diminished and in common focusing on some aspects mainly related to smart cities, mobility, etc. The frequency of the BRICS Urban Forums itself has dwindled or merged into the BRICS Friendship Cities and Local Government Cooperation Forum, and the specific mentions in points of the annual declarations after 2018 (Johannesburg 2018) have faded and lost positions in the list.

Starting from 2020, in which a virtual Forum was held in Moscow, the declarations related to urbanization have become generic, formal and repetitive until the last XIV Summit (2022 Beijing). with barely recognition of the activities of the Forum, whose recent documents moreover, they are not adequately disclosed. Hereunder are summarized the main events of the Brics Urbanization Forum:

- **2012** - Urbanization was first presented as a matter for the attention of the BRICS countries at the 4th BRICS Summit held in New Delhi - India on 29 March 2012. A key agenda item referred to the "need to address urban challenges linked to: Food Security, Poverty Alleviation, Rural-urban Migration, Water and Waste Management, Public Health and Sanitation". The Delhi Summit also agreed that the BRICS agenda should contain the sub-theme of sustainable urbanization.

In the resulting Delhi Declaration at Clause 44: *“The challenges of rapid urbanization, faced by all developing societies including our own, are multi-dimensional in nature covering a diversity of inter-linked issues. We direct our respective authorities to coordinate efforts and learn from best practices and technologies available that can make a meaningful difference to our societies”* and its supporting Action Plan, the BRICS partners resolved to coordinate efforts to learn from best practices and access available technologies, to better manage and plan for the rapid rate of urbanization in the BRICS partner countries, and to better understand the issues identified as major urban challenges by the member countries.

- **2013** - The First BRICS Urbanization Forum, following the above declaration, was held in New Delhi - India on 01 February 2013, focusing on urban infrastructure and other thematic areas within the umbrella of urbanization and infrastructure. and urged closer cooperation in line with the resolutions of Rio.
- **2013** - The second BRICS Urbanization Forum held in Durban - South Africa on 27-29 November 2013, took inspiration from Clause 134 of the Resolutions adopted by the United Nations Conference Rio+20 on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements which states that: *“We recognize the fact that, if they are well planned and developed, including through integrated planning and management approaches, cities can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies.”* And the Durban Declaration 2°BRICS Urbanization Forum clause 5.1 stated: *To deepen our understanding of rural-urban linkages as they manifest in our respective countries, and share knowledge and approaches as they have been applied in that rural and urban areas are economically, socially and environmentally interdependent and that cities and towns are engines of growth contributing to the development of both rural and urban human settlements. 5.2 To strategize and share experiences on approaches for the targeted development of vulnerable areas such as ‘mining’ towns, declining inner city areas, and areas of environmental degradation.*
- **2015** - VII BRICS Summit held in Ufa -Russia on 8–9 July 2015, the issue of urbanization has been also fully included in the BRICS " Long Term Strategy" Document, stating at point 2.4. *“with the aim to ensure economic, social and environmental urban sustainable development, mitigate urbanization processes and reduce inequalities between urban and rural infrastructures in the member states, encourage planning and governance,confirming all the commitments within the UN recommendations”*.
- **2016** -The third BRICS Urbanization Forum was held in Visakhapatnam - India , on 14 - 16 September 2016 with the theme *"Urban Transition in BRICS"* as objective, to ensure that the key issues of urbanization were placed on the global agenda of the member countries. The first plenary session on “New Urban Agenda” highlighted the new development strategy, readdressing the way cities & habitats have been planned, financed, developed, governed and managed in BRICS member nations and among the selected sub-themes were National Urban Agendas, Smart Cities, New Tows and Regional Planning.
- **2018** - The Declaration of the X BRICS SUMMIT held in Johannesburg in July 2018 *“BRICS in Africa: Collaboration for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity in the 4th Industrial Revolution”*. mentioned the urban issues in diverse clauses:

20. We reaffirm our commitment to fully implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to provide equitable, inclusive, open, all-round innovation-driven and sustainable development, in its three dimensions – economic, social and environmental - in a balanced and integrated manner.

27. We acknowledge the outcomes of the successive BRICS Environment Ministers' Meetings including the implementation of the Environmentally Friendly Technology Platform, Clean Rivers Umbrella Programme and the Partnership for Urban Environment Sustainability Initiative.

32. We remain committed to the continued implementation of the Agenda for BRICS cooperation on population matters 2015-2020, which was agreed to by the Ministers responsible for Population Matters in 2014, because the dynamics of population age structure changes in BRICS countries pose challenges and present opportunities, particularly with regard to gender inequality and women's rights, youth development, employment and the future of work, urbanisation, migration and ageing ..

- **2019– XI BRICS Summit Brasília Declaration" November 14, 2019**

65. We recognize the outcomes of the 5th BRICS Ministerial Meeting on Environment, held under the theme "Contribution of urban environmental management to improving the quality of life in cities". We underline the importance of BRICS environmental cooperation initiatives that contribute to the quality of life in our cities, through the sharing of knowledge and experience on important issues such as waste management, circular economy, in the context of sustainable consumption and production, sanitation and water quality, urban air quality and urban green areas

- **2020 - BRICS Urbanization Forum – 9-10 September –Russia 2020 (VTC);**

Experts discussed best practices, key issues and areas of urban development such as smart technologies, transport infrastructure development, and integrated approach to territorial development, investment raising and prospects for the housing and utilities sector transformation.

- **2020- XII BRICS Summit –RUSSIA 17 November 2020**

70.. We commend the progress of BRICS countries in tackling new challenges in urban areas and note the contribution of the BRICS Urbanization Forum towards these efforts.

- **2021-XIII Summit New Delhi Declaration INDIA –9 September 2021**

67. We commend the progress of BRICS countries in tackling new challenges in urban areas and note the contribution of the BRICS Smart Cities Workshop, Urbanisation Forum, and Friendship cities & Local Government Cooperation Forum towards these efforts.

- **2022- XIV BRICS Summit Beijing Declaration 23-24 June 2022**

70.....We commend the progress made by BRICS countries in promoting urban development, and appreciate the contribution of mechanisms including BRICS Urbanization Forum, BRICS Friendship Cities and Local Governments Cooperation Forum and BRICS International Municipal Forum to facilitating the building of more friendship city relations among BRICS countries and promoting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

From above emerges seems that the initial “momentum”, previous also to the UN -Rio + 20 Conference, is lost and a decreasing relevance of the urban issues in the agendas and declarations of the following yearly Summit, and attention not improved during or after the pandemic emergency, whose impacts on the big cities should rise awareness on the priority of the urban development.

NAM & Urban Development

Is to underline that approximately, two-thirds of the United Nations' members are represented at the Non-Aligned Movement, and they comprise 55% of the world's population. The 120 countries belonging to the NAM have been taking in account the urban issues in their objectives, entirely adopting the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, in their last two meetings very three years.

2016 - In fact the final document of the 17th Summit, held in island of Margarita, Venezuela the 17-18 September 2016, one month before the UN-Habitat III conference in Quito, they support the UN vision and approach, stating on housing and sustainable urban development at point 658: *The Heads of State or Government welcomed the offer by the Government of Ecuador to host the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), which will take place in Quito from 17 to 20 October 2016 and reaffirmed their commitment to actively participate at the highest possible level in Habitat III. In this regard, the Heads of State or Government also expressed their confidence that the Habitat III outcome document, the New Urban Agenda, which aims to be concise, action oriented, forward looking, to be an universal and spatially integrative document*

recognizing distinct globally evolving trends in order to face the current challenges of sustainable urban development, must provide renewed political commitment for sustainable urban development and to conceive/rethink cities and human settlements, through people-centered approach, to be accessible for all, to reduce inequalities and insecurity and promote inclusive sustainable economic growth in harmony with nature..

2019 - Three years later, the final declaration of the 18th Summit held the 25-26 October 2019 in Baku, the Republic of Azerbaijan, confirm their commitment and appreciation that the NAM principles were share in the Agenda 2030, stating states on housing and sustainable urban development at point 857: *The Heads of State and Government recalled with appreciation the adoption of the outcome document, entitled "New Urban Agenda", by the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) held in Quito, Ecuador, from 17 to 20 October 2016, a meaningful outcome which will guide the international community towards sustainable urban development and human settlements in the next twenty years and provide an opportunity to promote a positive, mutually reinforcing relationship between cities and their surroundings, across the human settlements continuum. They expressed their firm belief that sustainable urban development and human settlements are key drivers of sustainable development in national and sub-national development plans including the participation of local governments and relevant stakeholders.....*

858. The Heads of State and Government welcomed the convening of the first session of the UN-Habitat Assembly, held from 27-31 May 2019, at the headquarters of UN-Habitat, in Nairobi, Kenya, under the theme "Innovation for Better Quality of Life in Cities and Communities" and the Sub theme: "Accelerated implementation of the New Urban Agenda towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals". They also welcomed the establishment of the Executive Board of UN-Habitat and the election of its members.....

In the final document many sectors are interlinked as and is significant the attention posed on climate change, water, energy , risk prevention and is significant the attention posed on migration representing a phenomenon of global proportions which is forecasted to grow in importance due to a number of wide ranging factors.

2023 – The next 19th Summit, was scheduled to take place in Uganda in 2022, and postponed hopefully this year, and surely the urban issues will be faced, considering also the African location, where belong many of the NAM countries with rising impacts of urbanization.

BRICS/ NAM Urban Perspectives

There are perspectives there for a new urban development approach by these countries?

In my opinion yes, if there is enough spread awareness and consensus on the urgent need of a change of the ongoing urban policies. The ongoing challenges are involving heavily the emerging economies as those of 120 NAM nations, so is from them that can easier surge a new approach for a sustainable global development model alternative to the current one, that seems unable to respond to the new situation, that requires updated objectives and values.

From the above it clearly emerges that many of the principles the two groupings coincide, and some of the BRICS countries are already part of the NAM, as well as some of the potential members of the desired BRICS PLUS enlargement. For both BRICS/NAM, South-South cooperation is at the basis of their strategy. Both promote global economic, social and environmental development - in a balanced and integrated manner, prioritizing human needs, improving the urban environment, landscaping and environmental protection to preserve people's connection with nature. There are many other points of convergence and as far as urban development is concerned, they all share the indications of the 2030 Agenda and its objectives. Unfortunately, despite the fact that in recent years there has been a strong increase in the interest to environment and climate change, the urban development and its impacts do

not receive adequate relevance. In fact, not even in the documents shared on a global scale such as the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, or the documents of the various conferences such as COP 26 and COP 27, don't go beyond vague indications and generic recommendations, failing to understand that urban issues are a fundamental element for the global sustainable development, given that over half of the global population lives in urban areas.

The majority of BRICS and NAM countries are located in Asia (36) and Africa (53) where precisely the urban problems are aggravated by the growing urbanization of internal and international migratory flows due to climate change, desertification, regional conflicts, food crises with long-term impacts. The rural exodus and urbanization processes continue and cities becoming hubs of concentration of people, buildings, vehicles, goods, gadgets, but also slums, traffic, waste, pollution. The urban growth of rising number of metropolises, mostly Asian and African, show a similar trend: more people, more buildings, more cars, more commercial center, more energy and land consumption. This settlement model threatens the survival of the planet, because it would need more and more natural resources .if followed in the future.

Therefore is now the moment to look to an unpredictable future with a profound review of the entire scenario that, in addition to the impacts due to pandemic, will face rising economic and social problems at global level due to the ongoing war, not only in the directly interested countries but spread worldwide, for the energy and alimentary shortages, the production and logistics bottlenecks and other related factors. These challenges are involving heavily the emerging economies as those of NAM nations, so is from them that can easier surge a new approach for a sustainable global development model alternative to the current one, that seems unable to respond to the new situation, that requires updated strategies and values..

Hence the main aim is to re-launch the Spirit of Bandung for a real international cooperation enlarged to all emerging countries, according to the principles expressed at the time by the NAM, whose principles are the base of this movement and now still more indispensable for global rebalance and restructuring, and a closer cooperation with the BRICS nations that are assuming a rising role in the global scenario.

In this way the perspectives for reaching a shared vision and renewed urban strategies are positive and will be possible to start reducing, through a common action of the emerging countries, the current urbanization flows and mitigate the negative climate change impacts. It means a collective effort of all authorities, actors, local communities and citizens to modify the actual imposed consumerist urban model and revitalize the local traditional settlement ones.

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