

Goal 11:

SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



In many poor countries, the population of cities is growing faster than the infrastructure and institutions. The development of basic social goods such as roads, sewer systems, healthcare services and schools does not keep pace with population growth. The result is poverty and expanding slums. We cannot abolish poverty in the world without taking the challenges of cities seriously.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 states that countries must make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. This means making cities environmentally

friendly and comfortable to live in for the residents. Not least, this applies to vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities. No one should be left behind. In other words, universal design of cities is crucial. Cities need environmentally friendly means of transport, good systems for waste management, green lungs, safe housing and welfare services. Not least, there must be long-term planning that ensures that urban development keeps up with population growth. At the same time, it is important that individuals engage in their local environment and build good communities from the bottom up. Good and sustainable cities and communities must be created in a cooperation between the authorities and each individual citizen.

Biblical reflection

The Bible contains an ambivalent view on the city, often presenting it as a place of injustice and sin. The city creates differences among its inhabitants, its powerful exploit the poor, and it shows no mercy for those considered expendable. Not without reason, Cain, who murdered his brother, is portrayed as the founder of the first city (Genesis 4:17). The Bible draws a line from Sodom in Genesis to Babylon in its last book, Revelation.

At the same time, the Bible praises Jerusalem, the city of peace. Here the Lord dwells; in the last days, all nations shall stream to it in their longing for justice and peace. "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4).

Jerusalem, however, did not manage to live up to this vision. As in most cities, evil reigned, which caused the prophets' condemnation (Isaiah 1:21-23; Jeremiah 6:6-8).

Even so, the vision of the city of peace was kept alive. The Book of Revelation does not only talk about Babylon, the symbol of the power-hungry metropole spreading fear and destruction, but also about the new Jerusalem, a city with gates always open giving everyone access to its beauty and riches (Revelation 21:9-27). While Babylon is doomed to downfall, Jerusalem is sustainable and will remain forever.

Challenge

Do your local politicians focus on sustainable development? Can you influence them to improve on doing so?

Questions

- Is the Bible's ambiguous view of cities relevant in our time? Do cities have particular characteristics that promote differences between people?
- How can the vision of the New Jerusalem inspire our notion of sustainable cities and societies?

Prayer

*Good Holy Spirit, you are present everywhere people meet,
Walk through our streets and dance in our squares.
Help us to build safe cities with room for everyone.
Let plants and trees, hopes and futures blossom
and bloom where we live.*

We commit everything and everyone, into your hands, Lord. Amen.