**Cardiff Convention**

**October 29th, 2015**

***“People seldom do what they believe in. They do what’s convenient. Then they repent.”***

Quoting Bob Dylan, Allison Dutoit, of Gehl Architects, succinctly captured a central theme of the recent Cardiff Convention. It’s not enough to simply do what is convenient. Sometimes we have to make harder, longer-term, choices. In doing so we should not only learn from others around the world but we must also shape our own path.

Held in association with World Cities Day (31st October), the Cardiff Convention offered an opportunity for participants to share their thoughts on the future development of Cardiff and to learn from experiences elsewhere in the world. Cardiff is currently one of the fastest growing cities in the UK, in part due to the opportunities it offers for careers and a good quality of life. This presents its own challenges, both in managing the pressures of growth and in stimulating new activities to replace those that are in decline. Amongst the stresses facing cities such as Cardiff issues such as transport, employment, population growth, governance and finance loom large. The Cardiff Convention touched on all of these.

One of the key messages of the Convention is that people matter. A livable city, stressed Phil Bale (Leader of City of Cardiff Council), must offer opportunities for all. It is not enough to tackle the LSE’s challenges as separate tasks, rather we have to think about the city as a place for people, as a space which supports communities. It should offer protection, comfort, enjoyment and income. This requires a maturity in governance. A move from regulatory functions towards enabling activities, from simply approving actions to a more active facilitating agenda. As Allison Dutoit suggests, it is not enough to get the hardware and the software right, you also need to work on the ‘org-ware’, that is consider the institutional and organizational structures. This involves partnership, collaboration, co-creation and trust, at all levels.

Another key message of the Convention is the importance for Cardiff to shape its own future and not simply mimic others. Drawing on the experience of Austin, Texas, Julie Chase highlighted how her city had developed its offer as a major conference venue. Austin is not only now synonymous with the renowned South By South West (SXSW) festival but the city has also traded on its reputation for live music, investing in and supporting the live music industry in order that this is able to continue to flourish and so reinforce the city’s own offer.

Several key words also recurred throughout the Convention. These included the need to be creative, adaptive, agile and innovative. Whilst all four terms are at risk at being overused, the need for individuals, firms, communities and organisations to be able to shape their own roles, to prepare for change and to respond to changing circumstances is worth reiteration. This may partly be about getting the ‘org-ware’ right, but it is also very much about ensuring that we support the capacities to create new opportunities and forge new paths. In doing so, we can also help to ensure that our city is more resilient to future events, a point stressed by speakers such as Simon Power, of ARUP, and Setsuko Saya, of the OECD.

This was the second Cardiff Convention and demonstrated the potential that such an event can have. To fully realize that potential though, the organisers will need to consider how alternative views can also be included and heard. By creating a vibrant forum for debate the organisers could build a valuable learning forum contributing to the maturity in governance that Cllr. Phil Bale emphasized in his opening remarks.

The Convention was used by the City of Cardiff as an opportunity to launch its [Liveable City Report](https://www.cardiff.gov.uk/ENG/Your-Council/Strategies-plans-and-policies/Liveable-City-Report/Documents/Liveable%20city%20report%202015%20Final.pdf) – which includes the aim of becoming Europe’s most liveable capital city. As Jonathan Porritt, of Forum for the Future, says in his introduction to the report, people do like living in Cardiff. The challenge is how to ensure that this success does not undermine the future quality of the city and its surrounds. The message of both this report and the Convention is clear. Let’s not just do what’s convenient but consider the longer-term implications of our actions for the well-being of all our residents and visitors.

For further information please contact:

Adrian Healy
City Region Exchange

Cardiff University

Healya2@cardiff.ac.uk