

## INTRODUCTION

More than 35 years after the publication of *La Question Urbaine* by Manuel Castells, the urban question has to be asked anew. In the meantime the world is experiencing the fastest urbanisation in the history of man. In 1972 2.4 billion people lived in cities, in 2008 the urban population had already passed the 3.3 billion border (this is half of the world's population) and in 2030 with 4.9 billion people almost 60 % of the world's population will live in cities. Never before has human society gone through a comparable process of urban growth, nor have cities expanded as they are today. Within a few decennia new mega-cities or even meta-cities have arisen that are confronting the world with new urban cultures, with increasing social contradictions, and with new and unknown environmental threats. However, although these *super-agglomerations* are dominating the front pages of the urbanism debate, their actual impact is less dominant with only 9 % of the global urban population residing in cities of more than 10 million inhabitants.

Of greater importance, from this point of view, are the small and middle-sized cities (of up to 500,000 inhabitants) responsible for the accommodation of more than half of the world's urban population. According to the *United Nations Population Fund*, these cities will become catchment areas for the majority of the future population growth. Actually, the quality of life of people on average is much more dependent on the quality of these secondary cities than on the quality of the dominating mega-cities.

Contrary to the assumptions of many, urban growth in developing countries is not only caused by migration from rural to urban areas. An important factor is decreasing mortality that can be recognised in cities as well as rural areas. Caused by improved health systems, a more productive agriculture, and thus more and better food, the population in developing countries is growing in both cities and in rural areas. However, the capacity of rural areas is limited. They cannot accommodate the growing number of people. Thus, additional migration and the concentration of people in cities is inevitable, even if population numbers in rural areas remain stable on a global scale.

With almost 80% of the population living in cities, urbanisation in the so-called developed countries in Europe and North America seems to have reached saturation point. At first view, an opposite development can be recognised: Due to an ongoing process of suburbanisation, many cities are losing population, are losing (tax) income, and thus are losing the load-bearing capacity for facilities and infrastructure. On the other hand, the growing populations in expanding suburban areas are far from returning to a rural style livelihood. These areas are still embedded in the urban economy, and are still characterised by an urban lifestyle. In reality, spatially the cities are expanding into new metropolitan regions, while the administrative borders continue to be limited to the old municipalities.

In view of the evident recent effects of climate change it seems almost superfluous to stress the ecological threats of urbanisation. Limited energy resources, the Greenhouse Effect, rising sea levels, floods caused by melting glaciers, and the bareness caused by shifting climate zones are subjects of many international conferences and numerous debates between politicians, scientists and professionals. It makes it all the more startling then that these threats are barely recognised within architectural and urban design projects of recent years. Until now, only a minority of projects have applied advanced ecological technologies during the process of design and construction. As an example, traditional architecture and historical urban forms have always taken into account the climatic conditions of the region. However, globalisation and the belief in technical omnipotence have tended to support generic design approaches, regardless of the regional climatic conditions. This disregard of the basic rules of bioclimatic design has resulted in increased energy consumption caused, in warm climates, by the generation of urban heat islands and its growing needs for cooling, whereas in cold climates, the disregard has resulted in heat losses and energy waste. Comparable arguments can be developed for almost all forms of environmental pollution and

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for the exploitation of all natural resources. Considering the strong impact of urbanisation on the environment a radical re-orientation of urban planning and design approaches seems to be unavoidable.

The destructive effects of recent urbanisation processes are banked by the social effects related to them, in particular the concentration of poverty. The UNFPA Report 2007 estimates that on a global scale one billion people reside in slums, of which 90% are to be found in developing countries. Throughout the world, slum dwellers are confronted with a variety of problems of which poverty remains only one of their burdens. Other important aspects are: poor and overcrowded shelters in sometimes large urban or suburban areas, violence and crime, the lack of public services and infrastructure, limited accessibility to education and health care, unhealthy environments, and insecure land tenure. Moreover, the increasing risks from environmental hazards disproportionately affect poor people in vulnerable areas. Manuel Castells introduced in this framework the idea of the dual city, divided between the *haves and the have-not's* and based on a similarly divided labor market that allows barely any upward mobility.

We have become accustomed to the idea that urban poverty is mainly regarded as a problem of fast growing cities in developing countries. However, dual cities can also be found in developed countries. In many industrialised countries the distinction between rich and poor has increased during the last decennia. The reasons for this distinction are based on economic transformations – in particular, the loss of employment in the industrial sector, and the dismantling of the welfare state, caused by an attempt to reduce public expenditure. As a result the economical segregation within the city, and between city and suburbs, is on the increase, in many cases additionally amplified by growing ethnical contradictions. The slogan of the Third World, *coming back to the First*, indicates the problems many cities in 'developed' countries, are confronted with.

Additionally, the concentration of poverty becomes supported by a growing tendency which François Ascher once described as *Metapolisation*: The concentration of human and material richness in the most important agglomerations. The background of these developments is represented by fundamental changes in economic demands. Modern economies, in particular the new ICT based service economies, have become almost independent from natural resources and from the natural conditions of a respective site. The new economies have become 'footloose': Enterprises, factories and offices can be easily located from one city to another, from one country to the next or even, between continents. New criteria for locating enterprises, in a general sense, have become 'man-made'. Besides socio-economic criteria such as the cost of labour, a large and diversified labour market, and a high level of services and political stability, there remain a number of criteria directly related to urban planning and design: good international connectivity and local accessibility, well established infrastructure and facilities, and attractive housing areas in particular for qualified employees and attractive business sites. Last but not least, the image and the charisma of the city itself play an important role when companies choose a site for their enterprise. A common characteristic of these new criteria is that they can be influenced and improved through planning and design interventions.

Consequently, a major effect of globalisation is the increasing competition between cities and regions on a national and international level. To facilitate economic development, cities are more or less forced to make themselves attractive for investors and enterprises by investing in infrastructure, facilities and the development of attractive sites for new business development. An important role in this framework is taken by the so-called Large Urban Projects (LUP) – *Grandes Projets* – that are often realised through the reconstruction of urban wasteland, former industrial plants, old harbor areas etc., and are usually located on central sites in the city and in particular those suitable for the development of new business activities. A general attribute of these projects is that they are not developed as mono-functional business districts. In most cases Large Urban Projects combine offices with housing, shopping, restaurants, cultural facilities and attractive public spaces, in this way generating a new type of (multifunctional) urbanity. They, too, combine public and private functions, and thus are often developed in Public Private Partnership (PPP). The Centre Pompidou area in Paris, the London Docklands, and Battery Park City in New York City, have become pioneers for these new types of projects. In the meantime, almost every self-respecting city in the world developed comparable projects to promote city branding and to participate in the growing global competition.

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Although projects such as these play an important role for the economic development of cities they also have reverse side-effects in regard to urban sustainability. These projects demand substantial portions of public resources, concentrated on only a few areas – islands within the city – and in this way support fragmentation and segregation, and in many cases result in an unbalanced over-all development of the city at large. Moreover, the dominance of commercial interests means that there is little space or funds available for social and/or environmental aims. The majority of the projects remain socially exclusive, while focusing on the solvent demand, and reinforcing the idea that environmental issues can only play a role if they contribute to the image forming and branding of the site.

For decennia urban development has been dominated by a globalising economy and almost unlimited market demands. While economic power has become more concentrated in global command centers (Saskia Sassen), the influence of public planning has decreased in the framework of governmental decentralisation. Ulrich Beck talks about a deprivation of governmental power, while international political institutions still remain weak. However, the recent economic crisis has shown the limits of growth under the conditions of neo-liberalism. In this way the crisis also yields a chance for the urbanistic debate - what Beck is calling *Reflexive Modernization*: To generate new models for urban development, new concepts for urban design, and new approaches for planning and management that are able to guide the processes of expansion and transformation of cities and regions, to bridge social contradictions, to combat segregation and fragmentation, and to face the ecological challenges.

With this challenge in mind, in 2005 the International Forum on Urbanism (IFoU) was founded as a network of universities, research institutes and knowledge centers with the aim to strengthen the international collaboration in the field of urbanism, to initiate and realise international comparative research in the fields of urban design, planning and management of metropolitan areas and regions, to support the development and dissemination of knowledge on the international level, to organise international exchange program's of training and education and, last but not least, to facilitate the dialogue between the academic world, professional organisations, corporate entities and politicians. An important activity in this framework is the organisation of international conferences, taking place once a year in one of the member institutions.

In 2009, the 4<sup>th</sup> Conference of the International Forum on Urbanism (IFoU) takes place in Amsterdam and Delft under the title 'The New Urban Question – Urbanism beyond Neo-Liberalism'. The conference aims to rediscover the discipline of urban planning and design under the recent conditions of rapid urbanisation and urban transformation, ecological threats and economical crisis, and tries to generate an idea of urbanism beyond neo-liberalism. In this framework causes, reasons, and dependencies, of worldwide transformation processes have been analysed, and planning strategies and design concepts for a more equitable, more social, and more sustainable development of cities and regions have been explored.

This book presents the most important papers contributed to the conference and selected by the scientific committee<sup>1</sup>. The book is divided into 9 parts, following the layout of the conference.

- **Part 1: The New Urban Question** combines a number of fundamental articles with regard to the urbanistic debate, written by the keynote speakers of the conference. Laura Burkhalter and Manuel Castells open the debate with a contribution 'towards a new urban paradigm', emphasising the opportunities for change beyond the crisis. Saskia Sassen follows with a contribution to the ecology of city and nature. Wu Liangyong demands in his article a new thinking in architecture and urbanism in China. Remarkable is the date of publication: The text is based on a keynote speech given already in 1999 at the XX UIA Congress in Beijing. Hidetoshi Ohno proposes a paradigm shift of urban planning and architectural design away from modernist thinking, and away from the concept of growth. Henk Ovink and Hsia Chu-Joe both focus on the development of two important metropolitan regions, the Randstad Holland and the West Coast Metropolitan Region of Taiwan.
- **Part 2: The New Urban Economy** discusses the effects of globalisation, economical crises, competition, and competitiveness on the urban structure and city form.

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<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the enclosed compact disk contains all papers being presented on the conference.

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- **Part 3: The Urbanised Society** focuses on new forms of living together and new urban cultures as well as the effects of social contradictions within the city and between city and suburb.
  - **Part 4: Urban Technologies and Sustainability** in particular discusses integrated approaches for the development of sustainable urban technologies and infrastructures.
  - **Part 5: Transformation of the Urban Form** targets the question to what extent globalisation, economic changes, and the need for more sustainable solutions are transforming the urban form.
  - **Part 6: The Design of the New Urban Space** is focusing on design concepts and design principles.
  - **Part 7: The New Metropolitan Region** discusses a new kind of spatial form that Castells is calling the new metropolitan region: ‘urban constellations scattered throughout huge territorial expanses, functionally integrated and socially differentiated, around a multicentered structure’ (Castells 2005).
  - **Part 8: New Approaches of Urban Governance** concentrates on policies, tools and instruments for a more efficient, more integrated, and more sustainable urban development.
  - **Part 9: Changing Planning Cultures** explores the recent transform in planning approaches and methods, as cultural changes related to changing societal systems.

The conference and this book, present a wide scope of ideas, concepts, and opportunities for a new urbanism beyond the crisis, and beyond the period of neo-liberalism. Of course, many ideas discussed in this framework will remain utopian, in particular in view of the recent tendencies of neo-liberal reconstruction even after the crisis. But Ernst Bloch has already taught us that we need utopias, that utopias are essential to maintain – what he is calling a necessary condition of human society – the principle of hope.

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