

International Conference “Planning towards Sustainability and Resilience”, held from the 14th to the 15th of March 2018 at Century Park Hotel Manila, Philippines

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Keynote 1: The global Perspective:

**From Habitat I (Vancouver) to Habitat III (Quito) and beyond –
Lofty Objectives, but Meagre Impact on the Ground?**

Mr. Vice-President, Mr. Mayor, Mr. Ambassador, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I feel honoured by this opportunity to introduce this conference in Manila with a keynote from the global perspective. My topic is an extremely broad one, and my talk is bound to be subjective. Naturally, it will reflect some of my personal views on the subject.

Please allow me to start my talk with a personal note. Today we are meeting in Manila, one of the Southeast Asian megacities. It was also in Southeast Asia, where, many decades ago, I started my professional journey. After my graduation I worked for two years as a German volunteer planner with the Dept. of Town and Country Planning of Malaysia. In the Department I was then involved in the planning of new towns and of settlement schemes at the regional level.

But what immediately comes to my mind, is another lasting memory. One day in September 1974, when I was sitting in my office, I heard a crowd of more than 150 people shouting from outside the building: “Our houses have been destroyed! Where shall our children sleep?” In the early hours of the same day police forces, supported by a riot squad, had demolished 60 squatter houses, which had been erected on state land about six months earlier. The people had invested their life savings in those houses. Unlike in many other cases, the now homeless squatters did not disperse, but they staged a demonstration in front of the State Government Building. They were shouting loudly, and this demonstration was to last over many days. After the first day the people pitched tents on the lawn in front of the building. Eventually they were evicted for a second time.



Demonstration of Tasek Utara squatters in Malaysia, 1974 (photos: E. Schmidt-Kallert

Nothing spectacular, you may say. But for me this experience was an eye opener. The people were fighting for their right to shelter, and ostensibly I was on the side of a government that had destroyed their houses and deprived them of their livelihood.

This incident provided me with a lasting lesson for my professional life: As planners we should always plan for the people. And with the people. As urban planners we have a responsibility not just towards the powers that be, but for all inhabitants of the city or town, where we are posted. For the wealthy, the middle class and the informal settlers alike.

What do I intend to do in the next 27 minutes?

Outline of key-note:

1. From Vancouver to Quito
2. Taking stock of developments on the ground
 - 2.1 Have cities become more inclusive?
 - 2.1 Have our cities become more sustainable?
3. What needs to be done?
 - 3.1 Visions at the city level
 - 3.2 National spatial strategies
 - 3.3 Once again: Unconventional housing strategies
 - 3.4 Sustainable mobility and transport systems

1. From Vancouver to Quito

Habitat 1 held in Vancouver in 1976 was the first United Nations conference on urban settlements. The main outcome of the conference was a policy document, the Vancouver Declaration, with 64 recommendations for national governments. But what is remembered today by colleagues, who attended Habitat 1, are not the outcomes, but the unique spirit of

that gathering. For the first time in the history of UN conferences, there was a large and very vocal civil society gathering, the Habitat Forum, meeting and discussing in parallel to the official conference. Such diverse personalities as Mother Teresa and the English architect John Turner, who had for many years worked in the squatter settlements of Peru, were some of the key speakers of the Forum. Turner emphasized the inherent self-help potential of squatters. When news about wholesale demolitions of large squatter areas in Indian cities like Delhi and Bombay reached the conference (60,000 people were made homeless in a single night), this came like a bombshell. It had an immediate impact not only on the Forum, but also on the official conference. Many delegates became aware that demolition of squatter huts was no real solution to the rising housing crisis. Official attitudes towards squatters needed to change.

Thus the Vancouver Declaration proposed a complete reversal of housing policies. Among other things it called for

“ensuring security of tenure for unplanned settlements and provide sites and services for the informal sector”. Furthermore the Declaration called for promoting “aided self-help” as a cornerstone of future housing policies”.

In its most radical section, it advocated a pro-active land policy based on zoning, compensated expropriation, and public ownership wherever appropriate.

Another outcome of the Vancouver conference was the setting-up of UN Habitat in Nairobi as a new UN body.

In the aftermath of Habitat 1 some few countries in the Global South – but by no means all of them - adjusted their housing policies. International organizations started supporting and implementing upgrading and site and service schemes. Land policies, however, remained largely untouched. In this context we should remember that shortly after Habitat 1 neoliberalism began to dominate development policies in many parts of the world, whereas some of the recommendations of the Vancouver Declaration called for stronger state interventions in the housing sector and the land market.

Habitat 2, held in Istanbul 20 years later, was attended by more official government delegations than the Vancouver conference, and again there was a parallel civil society

Forum. The conference attracted more media coverage than its predecessor. The main outcome was a bulky policy document of 238 elaborate paragraphs, the Global Plan for Action. Discussions at the official conference largely focused on the question, whether or not to include in the closing document the “Human Right to Housing”. After the conference one serious shortfall became obvious: that the Global Plan for Action lacked an effective monitoring mechanism.

Consequently, few governments revised their housing and urban policies as a follow-up to Istanbul.

Again, another 20 years later, in 2016 the UN convened Habitat 3 in Quito. If numbers are a measure of the significance of a conference, Habitat 3 could be called a mega-event. With more than 40,000 people, especially from the global NGO and civil society scene, were in attendance. No doubt, it was a big show. But unlike in Vancouver, there was no big parallel forum, civil society activities were split into many workshops. And, more importantly, civil society had no influence on the outcome of the conference. Unlike in Vancouver and Quito, the closing document was not put to debate among the official delegates. Every contested issue had been ironed out in preliminary discussions. Even some government delegates were taken by surprise, when they realized that they had nothing to negotiate at the conference.

In hindsight some civil society activists have criticized that prior to the conference many NGOs had focused their advocacy on the promotion of the “Right to the City”, a somewhat fuzzy concept, which is open to many interpretations.

The New Urban Agenda, the closing document of the Quito conference, is shorter than the document produced in Istanbul. But what is the significance, the lasting value of that document?

Personally, I like the frequent reference to “all inhabitants” of cities. There is no distinction between citizens and non-citizens, between informal dwellers and middle class citizens, between newly migrated people and long term residents. Refugees are also lumped under “inhabitants”. There are some useful references to the importance of good urban and territorial planning, to affordable housing and to diversity within cities. But by and large, it is a very timid document. For example, there is no general statement against forced evictions. The NUA cautiously speaks of “arbitrary forced evictions” instead. Does this mean that

announced evictions are acceptable? Whether or not the NUA will have a lasting impact remains to be seen.

Meanwhile the “Sustainable Development Goals” are quoted much more widely. For example, the theme of our conferences is obviously based on SDG No. 11:

“Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”.

So let’s now leave the level of international conferences and proclamations, and let’s take stock of what has changed on the ground, say since Habitat 1, more than 40 years ago. In this section I will make references to countries of the Global South, but as the SDGs explicitly take a global perspective, I shall also refer to experiences in Global North, notably those of my own country, Germany.

2. Taking stock of developments on the ground

2.1 Have our cities become more inclusive?

On the surface, today cities in the Global South look very different from the cities some of us (or should I rather say: your parents and grandparents?) knew in the 1970s. One striking feature is the enormous growth of the middle class and the proliferation of middle class housing estates not only in middle income countries, but in most countries of the Global South. It is estimated that on the African continent the number of middle class families has doubled over the last 20 years. In Latin America this process started much earlier, but since the turn of the century industrial development has benefitted the middle class, and as a consequence vast new housing areas were planned and developed in all cities of the sub-continent. In Asia the situation varies from one country to another. In the 1970s, when I lived in Malaysia, I witnessed new housing estates and new towns for the middle class mushrooming at the periphery of all big cities. Other countries followed later. Over the last 25 years, China’s cities have been re-built into high-rise residential areas for the growing middle class. In nearly every country, gated communities have been developed, a phenomenon unknown 40 years ago.

But does this trend mean that societies in the Global South have developed into middle class societies, and that cities are now largely home to middle class families? Have the slum and squatter areas, the informal settlements, all disappeared?

The answer is: Not at all. When we take a walk in Chennai in India, in Rio in Brasil or in Addis in Ethiopia, we still see children sleeping in streets; we see pavement dwellers and beggars. By the way, even in European cities, there are more beggars in the streets these days than in the mid-70ies.

As mentioned, Habitat 1 gave a boost to more enlightened housing policies in some countries. In the years after Habitat I, there were in-fact fewer wholesale evictions worldwide. Upgrading projects were successfully implemented in many countries of the Global South. In Brazil many of the notorious Favelas were pacified. In an unprecedented upgrading programme they were provided with infrastructure, and ownership titles were issued. Sometimes the transformation even went to the extent of gentrification. For a while, it became fashionable for middle class people to move to an upgraded Favela.

Turkey managed to upgrade, or rather rebuild 80% of their Geçekondus, the Turkish variant of informal settlements within 20 years. Their inhabitants have now been fully integrated into the market economy.

But for the last ten or 15 years we had to witness a backlash. Once again, evictions have dramatically increased. In 2007 the Nigerian government evicted 700,000 informal settlers in Abuja from their houses. In the following year, Cameroon followed with mass evictions in the capital. The last decade saw a spate of evictions of informal settlers from riverbank settlements in Asian cities, mostly justified by flood protection considerations. Korail in Dacca, Kali Mas in Surabaya and various cases in Indian cities, to name just a few examples. Only recently we learnt about the evictions of Chinese migrant workers from the “urban villages” at the periphery of Beijing, where they had lodged for many years, even decades. As if there had never been Habitat conferences, as if there was no alternative to wholesale evictions. I am getting very emotional, every time I learn about such cases. Are planners all over the world repeating old mistakes?

But evictions are just the tip of an iceberg. The backlash goes deeper. Brazil built in Rio a network of new metro and tramway lines for the Olympics, but once again the Favelas were

left out, none of the metro stops has direct access to a Favelas. The inhabitants are more deprived than ever, Favelas have become no-go areas again, to the extent that the government has once again deployed the military there, and shoot-outs are the order of the day.

In Kenya the government has made the Right to Housing a constitutional right. This sounds very progressive. But when you go to Kibera in Nairobi, Africa's largest informal area with a population of 400,000, you fail to see any change on the ground. In-fact, what you see are dilapidated shacks, poor sanitation and abject poverty. Residents continue to rent single rooms from owners, who in the legal sense are not owners but slumlords. When the municipality built public toilets in the area and introduced a token user fee, people continued going to the bushes, in order to save the money. Government officials admit that Kibera is too difficult a setting for launching an upgrading programme.

In Brazil, in Kenya and in many other countries of the Global South the invisible walls between the formal and the informal city are today higher than ever.

Europe has always been proud of its unique tradition of relatively inclusive urbanism. Cities are more compact and less segregated than in the Americas. Traditionally, ghettos were unknown, and public space was accessible to everybody. What is more, people from all walks of life, migrants and long-term dwellers alike, used to feel attached to the city as a whole. This is changing. There is more visible poverty than before, also in a rich country like Germany, and social segregation and gentrification are on the increase.

So in conclusion, I dare say that world-wide our cities have become less inclusive.

2.2 Have cities become more sustainable?

Sustainability is a complex, multi-faceted concept. So let me just pick one aspect. When I first arrived at Ninoy Aquino International Airport a week ago, the journey to UP campus took three hours. Traffic jams, stop and go, an endless succession of red traffic lights. You all know this. The next morning, my colleague Mario delos Reyes shrugged his shoulders and said, 20 years ago the same trip would have taken less than 30 minutes.

30 years ago I lived in Ghana. African cities were then cities of walkers. The majority of citizens, including many civil servants, walked to their place of work. Now in the same cities thousands of minibuses are clogging the streets. Few people are walking. Middle-class people are driving their own car, and poor people take the minibus because there are no sidewalks and they don't want to be exposed to the exhaust of diesel cars all the time. They spend hours on end sitting in minibuses slowly moving from one traffic jam to the next one.

We all know the vicious circle: More cars, then the cities build more roads and more flyovers, but in the end there will be even more traffic jams.

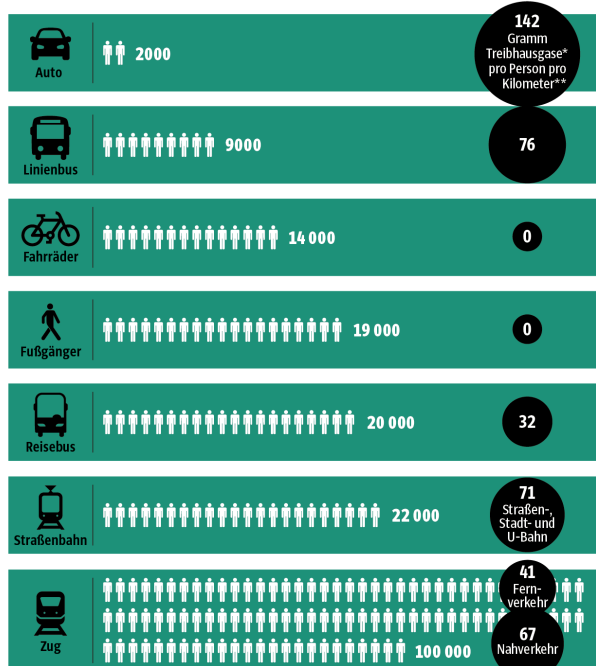
Every citizen of Mexico City spends on average 227 hours a year in traffic jams. The figure for Jakarta is nearly as high. The figure for Istanbul is 175, for Cologne in Germany 130, which is still too high.

This is valuable time lost for productive work, time motorists cannot spend with their family, their children or engaging in hobbies or exercises. Can we ever escape from this dilemma? Let me show you an interesting chart, which I found in a German newspaper two weeks ago:

Mobility needs space! (Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung 23.2.2018; compiled on the basis of different data sources)

Mobilität braucht Platz

entspricht tausend Menschen, die im Durchschnitt pro Stunde auf einem 3,5 Meter breiten Verkehrsweg befördert werden



*CO₂, CH₄ und N₂O angegeben in CO₂-Äquivalenten **Maßeinheit für beförderte Personen pro Kilometer

The left-hand part of the chart shows the number of people, who can be moved on a transport line of 3.5 m width within one hour, the bubbles on the right-hand side indicate Greenhouse emissions in grams per person per kilometer for each of the modes of transport. You can clearly see that ferrying people by motorcar from A to B needs an excessive amount of urban space, while cars are also responsible for the highest level of emissions.

What does this mean? Cars and motorized traffic are literally devouring our cities. We have surrendered the most valuable land in our cities to car parks and to roads, on which our citizens are wasting their time.

In conclusion I dare say: Our transport systems and our transport concepts are less sustainable than ever!

Finally, let me ask the question:

3. What needs to be done?

3.1 Visions at the city level

When looking at urban development in the last two decades, we have seen that there is less inclusion, and more fragmentation in our cities. In order to reverse this trend, our cities need new visions. Every city needs a visionary plan for its future development. Unfortunately, after the failure of many comprehensive urban master plans in the 1970ies, most metropolitan city governments in the Global South have shunned away from all-encompassing visions. The NUA mentions the ideal of the compact city, functional mix and polycentric city models. This is commendable, but such concepts need to be customised to the respective local context.

3.2 National spatial strategies

Likewise, very few countries in the Global South have embarked on a national spatial strategy. We live in an era of urbanisation. But rural areas have not ceased to exist. Rural areas are bound to maintain important functions in providing food security for a growing urban population, and there is still ample scope for industrial development away from

the big cities. Spatial planning at the national level can guide the future evolution of central places, the polycentric network of urban settlements of different scales and the future relationship between urban and rural areas.

3.3 Once again: Unconventional housing strategies

After a protracted dominance of neoliberal policies in many countries, current housing policies are heavily relying on the private sector. And, as mentioned, some governments are resorting again to wholesale demolitions.

To be sure, I do not advocate returning to the state-run low-cost housing schemes of the 1960ies and 1970ies. But I see considerable potential in more government support for the social production of housing. Support for models of collective or communal housing production. There are encouraging examples in such diverse countries as Uruguay, Argentina and – Germany. Governments could support such initiatives in multiple ways, e.g. by making land available or by allowing collective ownership titles.

And of-course, there should be a stop on all evictions. There is always an alternative, which can be negotiated between the authorities and the residents.

3.4 Sustainable mobility and transport systems

All our cities – both in the Global South and in the Global North are in dire need of a new type of mobility, which is closer to the human scale and which does less harm to the well functioning of our cities.

We need to drastically reduce the unsustainable use of space for the sole benefit of the motorcar (and the car industry and the car lobby). In Germany, a country of 82 million people, 46 million private cars are currently registered. Transport planners have calculated that with proper sharing systems alone this massive fleet of cars could be reduced by two thirds. But many more measures are necessary to bring about sustainable mobility:

We need to make cities attractive for walking and biking again;

We need better and more integrated public transport systems; in the Global South this should encompass the integration of paratransit (e.g. by Jeeps) into the system.

And now I am particularly addressing my colleagues, the urban planners, we need to re-plan land uses in our cities in a way, which reduces long journeys to work places, schools, shopping facilities etc.

No doubt: Sweeping changes in transport planning, in urban planning, in the management of transport system, moreover, changes in the mindset of citizens are required to bring about sustainable mobility.

At times, pilot projects may act as eye-openers for alternative ways of doing things. That's why I am showing you now such an on-going pilot project from my own region, the Ruhr Metropolitan Region in the western part of Germany. It is a freeway for cyclists of more than 100 kilometres, connecting the urban centres of the region. So far 15 kilometres of the track have been completed, and the freeway is already well patronised. It mainly follows former railway tracks. There is not a single traffic light, not a single level crossing. Cyclists can travel faster from their home to their workplace than commuters, who are using their car or those commuting by public transport. It is anticipated that once the freeway has been completed, it will have a marked impact on the modal split in favour of bicycle use.



Bike Freeway, Ruhr Metropolitan Region, proposed alignment (Source: Regionalverband Ruhr, 2018)



Bike Freeway, completed section (Source: Regionalverband Ruhr, 2018)



Bike Freeway, image of the anticipated end-state (Source: Regionalverband Ruhr, 2018)

Let me close on this note:

We all – politicians, LGUs, planners, activists and ordinary people have our role to play to transform our cities into more livable places. Let's get started!

Thank you.