

Check Against Delivery.
Embargoed until 9:00 AM, 6 November 2010

Metropolis: Our Common Future in the Urban Age? An Introduction

by Volker Kreibich
TU Dortmund University, Germany

Session 11, Opening
Our Common Future, Essen, November 6th, 2010

Draft

In my opening statement I intend to depart from the fact that mankind has entered the urban age to continue with a reflection on the term 'common' as the central term of the conference title: Can urbanization be conceived as a process to create and guarantee common pool resources (e.g. security, freedom, infrastructure, markets)? I also intend to reflect on the use of the term 'metropolis' as the header for our session. Different from megacity, metropolis evokes not only population size, power and international standing, but also complexity, interlinkages, exchange and dynamism. Can it be idealised as a European vision of mega-urbanisation? Again, the significance of the term needs to be well defined in the various contexts of present urbanisation. My fourth point of departure will be the paramount importance of governance for inclusive urban development. Efficient public planning is needed to secure urban functionality as a common pool resource.

1. In the urban age

Allow me to start with a somewhat solemn statement: Mankind has entered the urban age. For the first time in history the majority of the human population on planet earth is living in urban settlements.

Although this information is in the first place a statistical construct implying all sorts of definition problems, the 'urban transition' entails a plethora of social, economic and political implications including some seeming conceptual contradictions.

Urbanisation is progressing most rapidly in those countries and world regions which are still predominantly rural. The rapidly closing gap between rural and urban poverty rates can be understood as an effect of economic development like in China or as a reaction to persistent rural poverty like in Sub-Saharan Africa. Projections for 2020 suggest that rapid urbanisation in Africa may lead to a shift in the locus of poverty from rural to urban areas, leaving cities with a larger share of total poverty in the coming decades (UN-Habitat 2010: 28). In other words: Poverty is urbanising in Sub-Saharan Africa and in some parts of South Asia.

Throughout history and all over the world, cities have acted as engines of economic growth and social integration. To a certain degree rapid urbanisation in the least developed countries which (as we have learned in Session 3) experience constantly growing economies since the 1990s is supporting this experience. At the same time, however, domestic inequality in most of these countries is on the increase. It is safe to assume that this development which entails a tremendous conflict potential is an outcome of rapid urbanisation in poverty. Some of the fastest growing megacities can be found in the poorest countries (Lagos, Kinshasa, Dar es Salaam in Africa, Dhaka in Bangladesh) (*Figure 1: Megacities*). They are not the urban imprint of a booming economy, rather a response to rural hopelessness. Persisting rural poverty, environmental disasters and political conflicts make the 'urban pastures' appear 'greener', at least in relative terms, and drive the rural poor into the cities. Even in urban slums access to water, health, education and income earning opportunities are perceived as better accessible than in the village.

Urbanisation in poverty is also an outcome of poor governance. Even those African countries [and some countries of South and South-East Asia] which experienced high economic growth rates have not

experienced reductions in slum populations or urban poverty. "This would point to a pattern of 'pathological' urban growth which, fundamentally, reflects a lack of political will to tackle urban poverty in a systematic way, but can also derive from the poor performance of policies and programmes in many countries. [...] High slum prevalence in many African cities can be attributed to structural and political failures in the distribution of public goods, as well as to lack of human and financial resources to address urban poverty. Against this background, economic growth in many cases has had little impact on either poverty or inequality, or both. In other words, sustained economic growth has not been in a position to drive the urbanization process with desirable results. In the fastest growing African economies, such as oil-rich Angola and Sudan, slum dwellers constitute the majority – more than 80 per cent – of the urban population" (UN-Habitat 2010: 28).

From European experience and a Western perspective the emergent megacities in Africa (and other poor countries of the global South) appear inaudible and inexplicable. Taking a closer look, however, African cities have become places of innovation. They are poor in economic terms, but assimilation, integration, reworking and consolidation of new indigenous ways of thinking and doing things are unfolding in surprising constellations (Abdou-Maliq Simone 2004: 215). Reference to a limited concept of informality will be not sufficient to understand and explain the power and dynamics of this "city yet to come" (Simone 2004) and its evolving urban way of making a living.

The fascinating development of a new nexus between urban livelihoods and urban form under urbanisation in poverty will be reflected in the first two key note lectures and discussed in the first strand of workshops.

In Europe and parts of North America urbanisation has already passed a climax. In the wake of general population decline, transition from a centralist planned economy to a market economy in central and Eastern Europe, and de-industrialisation in old industrialised regions, many large cities have started to shrink and are struggling with restructuring [Hanover being an exception]. Social disparities are widening again and urban fragmentation is on the increase especially in those urban agglomerations where structural change met with foreign immigration.

These challenges confronting the European city will be reflected in the second group of keynote lectures and discussed in the second strand of workshops.

2. Urbanisation produced common goods

I have to begin this second part of my introduction again with an apology. I would like to take the most crucial term in the title to this conference, namely the adjective 'common', literally relating it to our urban future. It seems to me that it connotes not only a future which we are to endure jointly and which we cannot abscond, but a future which we can and have to manage commonly. With this view the term attains positive properties like shared, mutual, accessible, collective, communal or public.

The concept of public and common goods or pool resources provides us with an adequate analytical framework (Paul A. Samuelson, 1954). Common goods are non-excludable goods because it is impossible to exclude any individuals from consuming that good. They are by definition rivalrous goods because their consumption by one consumer can lead to subtractions from any other individual's consumption of that good. 'Public' or 'collective consumption goods' would be non-rivalrous goods.

This terminology is relevant in our context because the city can be seen as an institution providing common and public goods like safety and security (city walls), equity, freedom (of the city), infrastructure (wells, hospitals, cemeteries and religious places), markets, open spaces (for vehicular access, mobility and cultural needs), public transport and urban functionality. According to this understanding urbanisation would denote a process of establishing urban public and common goods.

The history of urbanisation is characterised by a continuous extension of the pool of common urban resources: in the Greek polis democracy and political participation (for the freemen); in the medieval free city protection from strife and warfare, independence from landlords, civil rights, safe business transactions; in the modern city safe drinking water, improved public health, street lightning, public transport, education, political participation. The provision of the wide range of public and common urban goods which we can enjoy in the cities of the developed world was indeed the outcome of a long and sometimes fierce struggle between public and individual private interests. In the developing world this

process is still in an early stage, interrupted or misused by powerful elites or questioned by international advisors.

Exclusion from common pool resources leads to discretionary access to livelihood assets, urban inequality and spatial fragmentation. In the informal settlement of Korail in Dhaka, Bangladesh, there is no public water supply. Instead, access to water is highly fragmented with 45 providers and 45 different regulations of access (*Figure 2: Hybrid regulation of water supply in Korail, Dhaka*). The consumers pay considerably more than the 'public' price charged by the municipal water authority.

Public space is a scarce and highly contested common good in all urban settlements. The large area of public open space (squares, streets, parks and gardens) provided in historic cities in Europe and other world regions is, therefore, astounding. Walled medieval cities provided more public open and usable space per citizen than many modern urbanisations. In the slums of Dhaka like in other large cities of the developing world, access to one of the few and highly contested open spaces is, on the contrary, subject to complicated 'informal' negotiations with diverse non-public institutions, individuals and groups (*Figure 3: The Field in Korail, Dhaka: activities before and after clearance, March 2009*). In contemporary privately or publicly planned urbanisations public open space is also highly contested and a scarce commodity for economic reasons.

In present-day urbanisation we can detect a problematic shift from the provision of public and common urban goods towards club and private goods with selective access. In the global North it is to a great part associated with practices of the affluent and powerful to protect themselves behind walls of stones, fees and regulations, while in the global South it is often the side effect of fierce struggles for an urban livelihood and of extremely unequal power relations. In both worlds the exclusion of the poor and disadvantaged from public goods with increasing inequality and urban fragmentation can be attributed to the continuous transformation of urban public and common goods into assets with controlled and limited access. In an analogy to Garret Harding's *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) we can term this practice where individuals go about to increase their private gains at the expense of urban common pool resources the 'tragedy of the urban commons'.

In dependence on another influential theoretical construct, the 'urban question', raised by Manuel Castells (1972), we can further deduce: When we want to solve the urban question we have to protect urban public and common pool resources. And, consequently: When we want to achieve a common future we have to solve the urban question.

The provision of public and common urban goods is dependent on good urban governance giving priority to common welfare and room to effective participation of all stakeholders. This issue will feature as a running theme in three out of the four workshops.

3. 'Metropolis' conveys a vision

Initially, the term 'metropolis' carried a critical if not derogative meaning. John Dos Passos in his influential novel 'Manhattan Transfer' (1925) demonises Manhattan, New York, as a big urban jungle. Similarly, Fritz Lang in his film 'Metropolis' (1927) allegorises the modern big city as a moloch which devours its citizens who live in a profoundly split society (*Figure 4: Fritz Lang, Metropolis*). Alfred Döblin, finally, in his expressionistic novel 'Berlin, Alexanderplatz' (1929) portrays Berlin, the leading metropolis of the 20s, as a pandemonium, a demonic place which annihilates its protagonists; however, he gives room to a new perspective of the metropolis as a place with boundless opportunities.

Later on this positive charge has become dominant. Today, the term 'metropolis' stands for an urban agglomeration with international status in one or several sectors, e.g. a financial, industrial or cultural metropolis, or a metropolis of crime. It seems even justified to ask if 'metropolis' could provide a European vision of mega-urbanisation: the complex, intermingled, multi-faceted urban agglomeration set against the highly segregated, mono-structural large urbanisations as they mushroom in the poor global South and in emerging economies.

Heinz Reif (2006, 3) in his comprehensive review of the metropolis discourse lists several characteristics of a metropolis:

- large population size (several million);

- structural wealth (material and cultural resources, high concentration of human and economic capital, representative urban form);
- outstanding national and international centrality;
- high immigration with high ethnic, social and cultural diversity, cosmopolitan orientation but also frictions and conflicts.

Reif supports the positive perception of the metropolis by observing that the diversity of people of different geographic, ethnic, social and cultural origin makes metropolises to spaces of chances and options, laboratories of progress, and engines of integration (ibid.: 4 ff). Large city size and high density support opportunities for individuals and groups and higher levels of social acceptance for minorities, including specific metropolitan chances for success and failure, of inclusion and exclusion, of innovation and traditional orientation.

Reif identifies two major threats to the modern Western metropolis. The first one emanates from increasing urban inequalities which UN-Habitat (2010) has recently comprehensively documented under the title "Bridging the urban divide". The binding element in modern metropolises is being weakened when the urban culture is fragmentising and social and ethnic disparities intensify to a level where disadvantaged minorities are being segregated in problem neighbourhoods, while privileged groups retreat into protected and secluded ghettos. Will the large European and US-American metropolises be able to maintain their innovation potential in the time of new mushrooming megacities in the global South?

The second threat, according to Reif, derives from the loss of public space which he identified as "the core element of previous integration and identity work". New media and communication networks and exploding urban sprawl leave in the metropolitan centres a conflicting mixture of gentrified ghettos of the elites and segregated neighbourhoods of the hopeless (Reif 2006: 13).

John Friedmann (1995), Saskia Sassen (1996) and other authors counter this culture-based pessimistic argument with the expectation that increasing globalisation is strengthening the old 'global cities' as centres of regulation in the global economy in an international network of exchange of people, goods, services and capital (Reif 2006: 16). They perceive global cities as anchor points of the capitalist world economy.

This view, however, has to take into account the new megacities with metropolitan qualities which grow rapidly in China, Singapore, India, Brazil and other threshold countries. They are first-order centres of large and thriving national economies and already extensively integrated into the world system. They combine the vital energy of cities with a young and migrant population with the full potential of modern communication technology, making use of their social and cultural diversity and deploying diversifiable capital. Will Mumbai become the prototype of the future metropolis?

A third category of megacities is mushrooming in the poor countries of the global South, e.g. Lagos, Kinshasa, Dhaka: Will they also attain positive qualities of a metropolis? Mega-urbanisation in poverty seems to be questioning the basic principles of the European-North-American metropolis model: informal urban growth versus comprehensive planning and land-use regulation; unchecked urban sprawl versus a privileged urban centre; high transaction costs versus economic efficiency; increasing inequality versus social progress; traditional orientation versus innovation (Reif 2006: 14). To make their prospects worse, most of these big agglomerations constitute areas of high natural and man-made risks.

So far the image of these poor megacities in the international media seems to confirm the negative allegories of the early discourse about the metropolis: urban jungle, moloch, pandemonium. Following Simone and other African authors, even UN-Habitat, we should, however, issue a caveat against this pessimistic perspective: The vitality of slums has the potential to create a so far unknown 'city yet to come' once the regulatory framework has improved. Most of these poor megacities are located in countries with large economic potentials which could be set free and made accessible not only to a corrupted elite but to the majority of citizens through better national and urban governance.

The 'metropolis yet to come' and the race between the prototypes New York and Mumbai will be subjects of the first two key note lectures.

4. Urban governance for an inclusive city

Turning economic, social, ethnic and cultural differences into diversity requires a supportive governance framework. The old metropolises of Europe and North America have well established systems ranging from highly centralised (e.g. Paris) to fully decentralised (The Ruhr) government institutions. There, the main challenge is no longer managing rapid urban growth but increasing social, ethnic, religious and cultural disparities resulting from high international migration and profound structural change (de-industrialisation) which tend to exclude growing segments of their citizens from 'their right to the city' (Lefebvre). The future of many old metropolises will to a considerable degree depend on their ability to defend their tradition of inclusive cities against new disparities and to transform them into productive cultural diversity.

This challenge will be discussed in Workshop 11.3 and in the Plenary with reference to Istanbul. In Workshop 11.4 Jean Hillier will introduce the concept of strategic navigation.

A very special case of strategic navigation can be observed in China where rapid urbanisation of a still rural society is closely monitored and regulated by a strong central state with powerful provincial and urban governments. Urban regulatory laboratories, an experimental growth policy, and conceded informality are central components of a highly diversified and effective regulatory landscape. It is, however, not inclusive by any means.

In the rapidly growing megacities of the poor global South statutory growth regulation and supply of public utilities is weak and erratic as a consequence of an ailing or even failing state under the pressure of urbanisation in poverty. In large or megacities like Dar es Salaam or Lagos where the majority of structures has been built without a building permit on land not assigned for housing and not served by public utilities government, both national and municipal, has to be perceived realistically as part of the problem. Urban settlers, especially in the sprawling low-density urban agglomerations of Sub-Saharan Africa, have to rely on locally crafted institutions to replace or compliment public authorities.

There, urban governance is yet to find an adequate division of labour between central governments on the national and municipal level and local institutions and organisations of urban growth regulation. Inclusion through recognition and participation seems to constitute the foremost challenge. A supportive institutional framework is still wanting in most rapidly urbanising countries of the poor global South.

According to UN-Habitat (2010: 56) "such a rights-based framework is predicated upon three requirements [...]:

- Cities must develop a vision that integrates everyone.
- Cities must put forward plans and implementation mechanisms that are adequately monitored and can be revised depending on outcomes.
- Cities must set up new institutions, or improve and strengthen existing ones, in order to ensure that they are inclusive, accountable and efficient".

The World Health Organisation (WHO 2010, modified) has estimated the tremendous benefits of good urban governance for the health sector: In developing countries, the best urban governance can help produce 75 years or more of life expectancy; with poor urban governance, life expectancy can be as low as 35 years.

5. Structure of the day

The first round of keynote lectures will be based on the notion that urbanization is increasingly interlinked with globalization and global change, albeit at different degrees in the regions of the world.

Ananya Roy will present her vision of the 21st century metropolis based on research and writings on urbanization in South Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. With a new look on informal modes of organizing space, livelihood, and citizenship she seeks to establish a theoretical agenda that revives the 'urban question' in a type of planning theory that is able to confront and analyze the urban transformations of the 21st century. Her focus on urban informality will also shed new light on the relation between state

power and community action in contemporary cities. Perhaps she will surprise us with some insights from her newly edited book the title of which could well have served as a motto for the session: "Worlding Cities".

Suketu Mehta has coined the wonderful term 'maximum city' for his prize-winning book "Bombay Lost and Found" in which he reconstructed the inside functioning of this Asian metropolis through journalistic investigation. Currently working on a nonfiction book about immigrants in contemporary New York, he will present and relate these two prototypes of globalised urbanization based on the complete range of fact finding methods at his command.

In the second round of keynote lectures we will narrow our focus on metropolisation and urban restructuring in Europe. This nexus contains a strategic question: Does the change of urban functions carry the risk of losing metropolitan standing or, to the contrary, the chance to widen the scope for global interaction?

Vittorio M. Lampugnani will highlight the architectural dimension and the history of "The City in the 20th Century", the title of his recently published book in two volumes, with a focus on European urban projects. Some of them are strongly influenced by metropolitan visions and utopias. The language for 'metropolitan' architecture has been coined by Fritz Lang in his homonymous film of 1925/26. With increasing global competition the symbolic message of the built city is of growing importance. Can XXL architecture already evoke metropolitan qualities?

Christoph Zöpel will zoom in on the 'genius loci' of the conference which is part of the Ruhr.2010 project. The Ruhr is the largest European industrial district and urban agglomeration but still – or once more? – struggling with its global recognition as a metropolis. In his contribution Christoph Zöpel will search for a new topos of 'metropolitan urban landscape'.

The Workshops:

Following Elinor Ostrom, sustainable management of common pool resources would require efficiently functioning institutions. Urbanization in poverty in the global south is, different from historic European urbanization, not being accompanied by adequate institution building, while urban restructuring in old industrialized agglomerations requires considerable adaptation of the institutional heritage. The design of the two parallel streams of workshops has been informed by these different challenges for urban governance.

Each workshop session will be opened up by a key speaker (two in WS 11.4) to be followed by two complementary contributions by GYF and OCF Fellows. There will be ample time for discussion.

Workshops 11.1 and 11.3 will discuss governance deficits accompanying urbanization in poverty in the global South. Wilbard Kombe will reflect on the potentials and limits of social regulation through local institutions in the absence of efficient public planning institutions based on experience from Sub-Saharan Africa. Carole Rakodi will discuss the role of planning participation as a factor to enhance the right to the city.

Workshops 11.2 and 11.4 are meant to deal with old industrialised urban agglomerations in Europe. Einhard Schmidt-Kallert will search for local identity and transnational networks in the Ruhr, while Jean Hillier and Gerald Wood will return to the urban governance strand in relation with structural change.

The plenary session will be organized by a group of five GYF Fellows as an outcome of their study tour to Istanbul, the second European Capital of Culture 2010 on the interchange between economy and urban diversity.

References

Bronger, Dirk (2004): Metropolen, Megastädte, Global Cities. Darmstadt.

Friedmann, John: The world city hypothesis. In: Knox, P. L.; Taylor, P. J. (eds.): World cities in a world system. Cambridge 1995

Hackenbroch, Kirsten (2010): No Security for the Poor - Contested Space in Low-income Settlements of Dhaka. In: Geographische Rundschau, International Editions, vol. 6, no. 2, 44-49pp.

Hardin, Garrett (1968). "The Tragedy of the Commons". *Science* 162: 1243-1248
(http://www.garrethardinsociety.org/articles/art_tragedy_of_the_commons.html;
<http://www.constitution.org/cmt/tragcomm.htm>)

Hossain Shahadat (2010): Dividing the ordinary. Negotiating water supply in an informal settlement of Dhaka. In: Rawani, A.; Kettani, H.; Ting, Z. (eds): Proceedings of the 2010 International Conference on Humanities, Historical and Social Sciences. World Academic Press; Liverpool, pp 614-619

Ostrom, Elinor (1990): *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Reif, Heinz (2006): *Metropolen. Geschichte, Begriffe, Methoden*. TU Berlin, Transatlantisches Graduiertenkolleg. (CMS Working Paper Series, 001-2006). Online (<http://www.metropolitanstudies.de>)

Sassen, Saskia (1996): *Metropolen des Weltmarktes*. Frankfurt a. Main.

UN-Habitat (2001): *Cities in a Globalizing World. Global Report on Human Settlements 2001*. London, pp. xxviii – xxix

UN-Habitat (2010): *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011. Bridging the urban divide*. Nairobi

WHO (2010): *World Health Day 2010. Health and Urbanization*.
<http://www.wpro.who.int/philippines/WHD10.htm>