

a worldwide series of conferences
investigating the future of cities

organised by the Cities Programme
at the London School of Economics and
Political Science and the Alfred Herrhausen Society,
the International Forum of Deutsche Bank

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Urban Age is a joint initiative of the Cities Programme at the London School of Economics and Political Science and Deutsche Bank's Alfred Herrhausen Society. Urban Age is a worldwide series of conferences on the future of cities designed to form the framework for the development of an ongoing dialogue between academic experts and urban practitioners.



THE CONTEXT

The world is entering an urban age. For the first time in the history of humanity, more than half of the earth's population will soon live in urbanised areas, and extended metropolitan landscapes will become the predominant form of human settlement. The greatest movement towards this contemporary urban transition is in the developing world and in particular the Asia Pacific region. Urban populations are growing exponentially and cities are exploding with ever more concentrated investment and overbuilt environments. At the same time, they are facing the challenging mandate to lead their countries towards global integration and modern lifestyles. Yet this is also an urban age for the advanced capitalist nations where, after decades of neglect, cities are once again at the centre of economic growth and social, political and cultural innovation. If negative trends of urban shrinkage, haphazard dispersal and thinning out of the city's core have not fully receded, these trends now coexist with renewed growth at the centre, the positive reappraisal of high urban densities and a rediscovery of vibrant and diverse inner-city neighbourhoods.

The late 20th century was commonly interpreted as an age of economic globalization in which speculative investment flows roamed the world in pursuit of maximum profit and minimum social constraint. At the same time, the city was dismissed as being doomed by a technological hyper-mobility that would nullify the need for co-location. In marked contrast, the contemporary urban age is filled with policy promise and a renewed confidence that urban problems can be solved from within. The city is now seen as an agglomeration of opportunities and a promising milieu rather than a concentration of problems and a site of despair: a resource rather than a liability. A number of disciplines assert new confidence in the possibility of steering the urbanisation process so that it produces more efficient, equitable and liveable outcomes.

Although their disparate trainings can sometimes obscure the meanings of each other's utterances, architects, planners, economic development practitioners and other city-building professionals would likely agree with the proposition that the city is once again germane ground for meaningful intervention. A multitude of recent new localist, new regionalist and new urbanist manifestos attest to this claim.

Worldwide, urban policymakers still struggle to balance the escalation of public and private investment in cities with more sustainable forms of urban development. Questions regarding the size, shape, and spatial distributions of densities, land uses and morphologically differentiated areas of the city have become increasingly complex and politicised. The design of the built environment, the distribution of urban density, and their impacts on social inclusion and quality of life, are at the forefront of political discussions in cities across the globe. More often than not, traditional models of urban growth and theories of city form fail to explain the dynamics now evident both in the networked global city, which thrives as a new economic centrality in the world system, and in the mega-city, which faces severe pressures generated by its own relentless growth. Moreover, these contemporary stylised paradigms seem to confound themselves in the cities of both the developed North and the developing South, of the individualist West and the group-oriented East. A set of common challenges face New York and London, but also Mexico City and Johannesburg or the rapidly growing Shanghai. The development patterns of these cities generate important conceptual and practical questions and should prompt us to rethink basic notions of urbanity and "city-ness".

THE CONFERENCES

The principle aim of the Urban Age is to shape the thinking and practice of urban leaders. The two-year conference series is the first step towards the creation of an ongoing forum which will debate and influence how the city is studied, planned and managed. The series will operate as a mobile laboratory, testing and sampling the urban condition using a combination of expert presentations, site visits and opportunities for informal information exchanges. These results will then be analysed, searching for regional patterns and global similarities that will shape the future development of cities and the processes that sustain them.

CONFERENCE FORMAT

Each Urban Age conference will last for two days. Invited participants will include individuals from various fields, including the academic, policy, design, development and business communities. The conferences will be limited to a group of 50-75 people, small enough to allow for discursive sessions amongst all participants, yet large enough to incorporate many opinions and backgrounds. Four core themes will provide focus in each conference, reflecting the basic human activities of living, working, playing and moving:

- Labour and work places
- Public life and urban space
- Mobility and transport
- Housing and neighbourhoods

In addition, four broader, overarching governance issues will be investigated. These are:

- Investment and economic development
- Planning and legal structures
- Sustainability and energy consumption
- Political economy and networking cities

In order to address local and global concerns, urban experts representing each core research theme and a group of urban practitioners including architects, politicians, engineers and planners will travel to all conferences, accumulating knowledge and comparative experiences through participation in each conference throughout the two-year period. The traveling “sounding board” will work in conjunction with local experts from the host region. At each conference, regional experts from each of the core knowledge areas will give visual presentations on how the core themes impact upon the urban conditions in their geographic region. Presentations will utilise knowledge gained from lessons learned ‘on the ground’ and will discuss how policy is responding to the dominant urban trends in each city. These presentations and subsequent publications will employ different modes of translating information from the two-dimensional geographic scale to the three-dimensional urban design scale, thus facilitating dialogue between academics, policymakers and practitioners.

A key objective of the Urban Age conference series is to identify what trends and policies are failing to respond to local needs, resulting in the continued propagation of dysfunctional urban areas across the globe. In addition to the academic experts, a group of urban practitioners, comprised of politicians, architects and engineers, will be present at each conference, supporting and challenging the notions put forth by the academics and local participants.

CONFERENCE OUTPUTS

While the primary objective of the Urban Age conference series is to shape urban practices by engaging the various actors in a meaningful dialogue, lessons learned from discussions will challenge many existing policies and modes of operation. Following each conference, the traveling experts will compose reflection papers, based on responses to issues raised during presentations and discussions.

Experts will also contribute to the final “Urban Age blueprint for cities”, which will chart the accumulation of international knowledge and urban best-practice. This book will be widely distributed in the autumn of 2006, coinciding with the final conference in Berlin.

KEY QUESTIONS

The question for architects, urbanists and mayors is how to plan and manage infrastructure and development without constraining growth, while simultaneously promoting the social and economic benefits of proximity and complexity in compact urban systems. The aspirations are clear, but the actual impact on the social economy of urban communities has yet to be understood. The process of investigation and exchange of the Urban Age will provide clues to the next generation of urban policymakers to better understand these interrelationships and successfully connect the physical arrangement of the built environment to sustainable growth.

Core topics will be discussed at both the larger geographic scale as well as the smaller urban design scale, while simultaneously linking them to the political and decision-making structures by which they are influenced. The specific thematic issues which each core knowledge area will address include:

Labour market and work places

- Cities as accumulation of wealth – where are the jobs and who has access to the jobs?
- Silicon Valley vs. Silicon Alley – rediscovery of the city for face-to-face transactions.
- Centrifugal vs. centripetal dynamics of urbanisation (‘urban sprawl’ vs. ‘urban centrality’).

- Knowledge based economies and innovation processes ('innovative clusters' and 'innovative milieus').
- What are the driving forces of the formation and restructuring of the economic bases of cities and the impact on the patterns of urbanisation?
- What are the impacts of globalisation and IT on the economic base and social structure of cities?
- Large scale urban development projects and the role of real estate development.
- How can new spatial structures create future synergies between living, working and leisure?

Public life and urban space

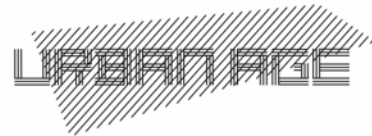
- How do cities promote legitimacy and fairness?
- How can local identity be reflected in globalised built forms?
- What are the effects of increased privatization and control on the public life of urban communities?
- What resources do cities possess to deal with risks of social disorder and major threats?
- How dependent are cities on decision-making processes at the local, national and supra-national level?
- What are the mechanisms of co-production of safety and security in the urban environment?
- How does the public realm facilitate civic life, engagement, a sense of citizenship and civic pride?

Mobility and transport

- What are the effects of transport systems on urban society, economy and environment?
- What are the characteristic of transport systems in sustainable parts of the city?
- What financing strategies can be utilised as management tools for transport systems?
- How can we use transport and mobility studies to further understand the specific spatial implications of moving people and goods in cities on the level of the everyday experience?
- Are there strategies for incorporating planning for transport at the micro level – such as the design of street and public space, local accessibility to public transport and the experience of 'being in motion' – into an overall, city-wide accessibility strategy?

Housing and urban neighbourhoods

- The fragmented, zoned city vs. the integrated, compact city: a policy choice.
- Social exclusion and urban design: creating ghettos of rich and poor or cultivating integration?
- What are the main characteristics of the built form that support inclusive neighbourhoods, allowing for successful family living?
- How do we develop an idea of the ideal urban density, if it exists – or how much variation should be appreciated?
- How can we balance informal housing developments with the need for basic infrastructure?
- What is the logic of 'shrinking cities' in the developed world and 'exploding cities' in the developing world?



CONFERENCE DATES AND LOCATIONS

Six cities, representing urban regions in each of the major continents, have been chosen as partner cities for the Urban Age conference series:

New York | 25 and 26 February 2005

Opening Conference, North American Regional Conference

Shanghai | 7 to 9 July 2005

Asian Regional Conference

London | 11 to 13 November 2005

European Regional Conference, European Mayors Conference

Mexico City | 24 to 25 February 2006

Latin American Regional Conference

Johannesburg | 6 to 8 July 2006

African Regional Conference

Berlin | 10 to 11 November 2006

Final Conference

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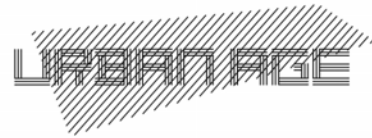
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