



URBAN DIALOGUES: VISIONS AND POSITIONS FOR MUMBAI

Suzi Hall, PhD Candidate in the Cities Programme, LSE

What makes the format of an Urban Age conference relevant? The Urban Age India conference held in Mumbai in November was tightly structured, as a platform for extremely diverse dialogues about the city it had to be. Approximately 300 hundred people attended each day, with audience, guest speakers and panellists drawn from diverse backgrounds. The different dialogues over these two days were sustained by multi-disciplinary professionals from the built environment, researchers and academics, journalists and writers, speculators and concerned citizens and various forms of city leaders representing national, regional and city government, as well as community activists. To add spice to this melting pot, presenters and panellists came from very different kinds of cities around the globe. Here was the opportunity for the Mayor of Washington to sit alongside the Chief Minister of Delhi and the Governor of São Paulo. For the participant, the privilege extended to accessing a basic overview of the variety of concerns and approaches at play in cities around the world.

Mornings and afternoons were broken into two sessions oriented around key issues: the Global Urban Context, Envisioning the Future for Global Cities, Housing the Urban Poor, Climate Change and Cities and How Cities are Planned. Panoramic views of the current state of global cities were juxtaposed with the microcosmic worlds of local projects. When speakers focused on Mumbai, there was a marked emphasis for its future prospects. The visions of Mumbai as a 'world city' with analogies made to Dubai and Shanghai contrasted explicitly with the concerns for a city grappling with the problems and possibilities associated with a profound scale of urbanisation.

In the differing articulations of the way forward for the contemporary city, it seems that the language of vision is distinct from the language of position. The range of vision plans presented for different cities rely

on the now familiar terminology of sustainability, economic growth and social equity. But the challenges of how to proceed depend on different words, ones which define pressing issues and the urgency of delivery. The strategies and projects presented by the Chief Minister of Delhi, Sheila Dikshit, and by Enrique Peñalosa, the Mayor of Bogotá (1998-2001) revealed the impetus of leadership – taking a stance, choosing a direction, and delivering on the ground. These contrasts between visions and positions are critical for the Urban Age, as for any urban forum. The relevance of urban dialogues emerge not only in the form of consensus and general visions, but more specifically in the diverse and difficult directions taken within the context of local particularities. Perhaps there is need for a second tier dialogue that complements this larger conference, one where smaller groups grapple with the complexities of defining what constitutes an urban position.

Outside of the conference and the air conditioned Hilton Hotel, I caught a brief glimpse into Mumbai as I travelled by taxi for two hours each way crossing from the north of the city to Nariman Point in the south. With the taxi hooter constantly accompanying our incremental movement across crammed lanes of traffic, I passed the pinnacles of speculation reminiscent of Dubai and Johannesburg – the spectrum of an everywhere and nowhere architecture. At street level a parallel city is rampant – an energy on the pavement where everyone appears to be frantic; moving, trading, eating, conversing. What possibilities would be unleashed by acknowledging and supporting this magnitude of individual energies? As Jerry Frug commented, "Mumbai makes New York look lazy!"

Contact:

Cities Programme
London School of Economics
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE

+44 (0)20 7955 7706
urban.age@lse.ac.uk
www.urban-age.net

Alfred Herrhausen Society
Deutsche Bank
Unter den Linden 13/15
10117 Berlin
Germany

T +49 (0)30 3407 4201
ute.weiland@db.com
www.alfred-herrhausen-gesellschaft.de



a worldwide investigation into the future of cities
organised by the Cities Programme
the London School of Economics and
Political Science and the Alfred Herrhausen Society,
the International Forum of Deutsche Bank



Alfred Herrhausen Society
The International Forum of Deutsche Bank

