

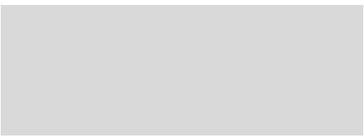
Introduction

This third volume of the International Geographical Union Young Scholars Committee focuses on the theme of transforming cities in a range of international contexts from Europe to Japan. The individual chapters focus on particular dimensions of that transformation – governance, social, cultural and economic - drawing on on-going research from all of the scholars included. Key concepts such as urban and regional development, agents of change, urban structure and regeneration are examined. While the focus is on particular case studies, we believe these issues are of importance more generally and hope they provide a resource and contribute to a better understanding of cities and urban processes in comparative perspective.

The first chapter in the volume was a collaborative effort that emerged from the Young Scholars workshop held at the 2012 IGU Urban Commission conference in Dortmund, Germany. During that workshop, colleagues from across the world discussed a number of key issues facing cities with the overall goal of trying to address major similarities and differences faced by urban areas globally. Following the workshop, a collaborative writing exercise took place on-line to develop this paper that was then finalised by the editors.

The Young Scholars Committee aims to encourage participation and debate among younger academics on pressing urban issues at and beyond the regular urban commission conferences, as well as providing a forum for network-building and a platform for possible future research collaborations. Our goal is to develop a community of inquiry that shares and learns from international practice and can support better understanding of our towns and cities.

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A New Urban Crisis? International perspectives

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The IGU Urban Commission Young Scholars met at the annual meeting in Dortmund, Germany to discuss the theme of ‘A New Urban Crisis’. Over the last five years, the global economic crisis has re-shaped the context within which cities are developing. In many parts of the world, ‘cities are clearly on the front line when it comes to the impact of the crisis and ... will play a major role in both exploring and implementing many of the solutions which directly effect people’s lives’ (www.urbact.eu). The radical transformations affecting the socio-economic structure are having particularly intense impact among urban populations and in the urban environment. Regeneration and development projects conceived during periods of growth are now put at risk by lack of finance for the new services they promised to offer. However, the ‘global’ economic crisis is not so global in nature. While Europe and North America have experienced major economic upheavals, other parts of the world have been less affected, such as Australia. In parts of the world, like Brazil, India and China economic growth is driving significant development

and generating management pressures. Our workshop aimed to explore the variety of challenges affecting cities globally, highlighting in particular global differences and similarities; to discuss whether it is possible to define a ‘new’ urban crisis or whether we are simply witnessing the intensification of ‘latent processes’; and to share ideas / solutions / innovations that could present a path through the range of challenges being faced by urban areas.

Challenges being faced by cities

In the contemporary context, cities face a range of social, economic, environmental/physical challenges. These vary spatially but a number of key issues can be identified at a macro-scale. During discussion, each participant identified the key challenges affecting the cities with which they are most familiar and the results are presented in Table 1 below. Broadly, a number of major issues have been defined as follows:

1. European cities have been particularly negatively affected by the economic crisis and key challenges appear to be: Unemployment, housing, attracting investment, transforming economic structures, lower budgets / income and lack of public money. In a Japanese context, maintaining urban vitality and developing sustainable suburbs are key issues in ensuring the continued economic development of the cities.
2. From a social perspective, a range of common issues have been identified that affect a number of regions. Specifically these include: ageing populations, small number of children affecting the viability of certain services, increasing social polarisation, safety issues particularly in immigrant neighbourhoods, exclusion, and how education policy can link to growth strategies.
3. However, cities globally are also challenged by environmental and physical issues, including *inter alia*, lack of public spaces, deterioration of public spaces and buildings, poorly planned and inadequate infrastructure, issues relating to climate change, particularly in an Asian context, and lack of clarity about how best to develop the idea of ‘eco-cities’.

While some of these clearly affect cities all over the globe, others are more regionally-specific. Our discussion therefore continues by assessing the most appropriate scale at which to understand and therefore begin to address urban challenges.

The scalar dimension

Urban areas worldwide currently face significant challenges that might impact their future viability and vitality. These dynamics are completely reshaping our thinking about cities and other urban areas and have to do with economic, social, physical and environmental issues as well as with cultural, identity and individual challenges. It is necessary to question their regional implications to understand the issues planners need to deal with.

When we consider the significant number of challenges from different points of view, one can conclude that almost all have a global dimension. Focusing on the social dimension, questions like ageing, education or unemployment arise as major issues for almost all regions, as seen in the scientific literature and the political discourse in recent years. Economically, globalization and internationalization processes have turned the world into a global playing field where all urban areas compete. In this context, innovation and competitiveness emerge as key words to understand the global urban challenges. Regarding environmental aspects, sustainability became one of the main global urban objectives of the last decade of the 20th century, even though a majority of countries and regions have tended to favour economic growth at the expense of environmental concerns. Finally, physical challenges also appear at the global scale, translating the effects of social, economic and environmental policies on the urban territories through housing, accessibility and mobility policies.

Although we argue that most of the current urban challenges arise at a global scale, we propose that these global problems have different rhythm scales and should be dealt with on a regional level. The “spiky world” identified by Richard Florida is characterized by a differentiated distribution of population, economic activities and innovation dynamics, but also by other factors such as social and cultural differences. Subsequent local idiosyncrasies must be taken into account when looking at practical

solutions. Regional economic issues, predominantly innovation and differentiation, are particularly relevant in today's global world. Regions need to find and sometimes alter their own *raison d'être*, and find niches through which they can compete on a global stage. As far as housing is concerned, some areas experience a lack of affordable housing while others deal with the quality and diversity of the housing stock. Issues arising from the development of high density urban areas in Asia or in South America (e.g. Brazilian favelas) are very different from problems relating to the flight from the city in some European cases. In terms of labour, some countries are dealing with growing numbers of youth unemployment (e.g. the "PIIGS" – Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain) while others are still dealing with working condition reforms. Indeed, while most of these problems are global in nature, they manifest themselves very differently at the local level.

In this context, governance and welfare emerge as key elements to consider in understanding urban challenges and potential solutions. Due to the global dimensions of these challenges, it is possible that cities and regions can learn from each other across the spectrum. New governance and planning models emerging around the world can be examined and adapted to achieve better welfare and sustainability, albeit within the context of different social and cultural norms that structure and influence approaches to change. The challenges that make spatial planning increasingly complex in our everyday changing world are multi-scalar and multi-temporal. Despite the importance of global concerns, responses to current challenges must be adaptable to the specificities of each area and responsive to particular territorial and population needs.

Opportunities to address urban challenges

Finding solutions to the challenges of urban policy may in the next 5-10 years be more difficult than before. In the face of the economic crisis and the declining GDP growth rate, a major problem arises – how to generate financial resources for urban development. In new economic conditions large infrastructure investments such as the flagship and symbolic projects that drove the development strategies of cities across the world in the 1990s and first decade of the 21st century may be difficult to realize. It will also be

more difficult in the current fiscal environment to obtain funding from national budgets and international funds (e.g. European Union) to address urban challenges.

In this context, the need for more communication and cooperation between cities should be underlined. On the one hand, it is important to share experiences and best practices. The effective, efficient and socially acceptable solutions to urban problems that were successfully introduced in some cities can make their way, in a culturally sensitive way, to other urban regions. Cooperation could also lead to joint investment projects or at least coordination of urban development strategies and programmes across regions and perhaps frontiers. Instead of competing and ‘copying’ metropolitan or supra-local functions, especially those that require costly investments, a focus on achieving greater complementarity between cities and regional centers should become a priority.

The more rational management of public funds is required and this could mean moving away from large flagship ventures to more human-scale projects, which directly benefit the citizens and involve the more in creating urban development policy. The crisis calls for increased public participation in the management of the city and could be an opportunity to remodel city management structures in order to increase participation and create more liveable cities.

TRANSFORMING CITIES: URBAN PROCESSES AND STRUCTURE

Economic		Social		Physical		Other	
Linking urban growth to port development, new types of activity for them	Le Havre, Antwerp, Rotterdam	Deterioration of city centres	Small and medium-sizes cities in Japan	Sustainable development in suburbs (housing)	Tokyo	Climate change, CO2, Energy	Tokyo
Urban employment in relation to port needs	Le Have, Antwerp and Rotterdam	Destruction of welfare state'	Girona	Big projects which end in a financial disaster	Bonn (but also other German cities)	Freiburg as 'ecocity'	
~	Shangha (China)	Youth unemployment	Girona	Poor condition of old tenements (pre-1914)	Poznan	Separation of living quarters by large transport arteries	Antwerp
Lower budget income (central govt cuts in taxes and subsidies, suburbanisation and outflow of richer residents	Poznan	Drugs and criminality	Porto	Road infrastructure from Communist period	Poznan	Lack of greenspace	Tokyo
High debt as result of Euro 2012 investment	Poznan	Concentration of poverty	Porto	Deterioration of builings and public space	Porto	Public transportation & mobility	Tokyo and other Japanese cities
Overurbanisation	Tokyo	High% of aged people in urban centres	Porto	Parking and accessibility	Porto	Efficient public transport between city core and urban area	Santiago de Compostela
Position of Moscow in relation to other Russian cities for FDI	Moscow	Aging	Cities in Tohoku region, Japan	Governance and planning: the "real" functional city and mobility	Girona		
Maintaining vitality of city in post-growth society	Sendai City, Japan	Aging and low fertility	Japan	Pollution	Girona		
Unemployment	southern Europe	Housing crisis, especially housing lower classes	Paris				
How to continue to attract MNC's	Lausanne	Resistance against large infrastructure projects (NIMBY)	Antwerp				
Lack of money to solve problems	Porto	Social polarisation	Brussels				
Lack of regional articulation concerning, for example, housing policy	Porto	Harassment of women and general unsafety in migrant neighbourhoods	Brussels				
Economic diversifications	Santiago de Compostela	Age prpblem	EU and China				
Local debt / debt of the communities	Bonn and North Rhine Westphalia	Food security	China				
Long term recession and negative economic condition	Tokyo	Overpoliticised decsions	Hungary				
Housing shortage / bubble	Paris	Lack of transparency in development projects	Hungary				
Transform economic basis from reliance on construction and unskilled services	Girona	Social polarisation	Ruhr region				
Housing at affordable prices	Girona	Aging and low fertility	Tokyo				
		Insecurity, mobility, pollution	Mexico City				
		Favouring use of cultural facilities by cultural associations	Santiago de Compostela				
		Lower number of children and young people / closing of schools	Poznan				
		Ageing of population	Poznan				
		Movement / anti-capital movement	Berlin				

Table 1: Selected challenges facing contemporary cities globally

Conclusion – A possible research agenda

This short paper has reported on the collaborative work undertaken within, and after, the Young Scholars workshop at the Dortmund conference. The different challenges faced by cities in Europe, Asia and Latin America at present are recognised, but all are developing within specific local and national contexts influenced by more general global trends. The possibility of adopting cross-national and comparative approaches to understanding and dealing with pressing urban issues has been highlighted and provides a possible research agenda into the future. Some of the themes examined in this paper such as the need for multi-scalar understandings of urban governance, housing crises, regeneration and the financialisation of the city are discussed in more detail with reference to specific case studies in the following chapters.

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