PRESS RELEASE

Fast Forward – Planning in a (hyper) dynamic urban context
48th ISOCARP Congress Perm / Russia 10-13 September 2012

By Stefan Rau, Congress General Rapporteur

The 2012 World Congress of the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP) was co-hosted with the City and Region of Perm and the Russian Urban Planning Association (RUPA). It took place from September 10 to 13 in Europe’s easternmost city of Perm in Russia and attracted 450 experts from over 40 countries. Sixteen keynote speakers including representatives from UN Habitat, World Urban Campaign, the European Council of Spatial Planners and the Government of Indonesia as well as more than one hundred experts presented case studies, innovative policies and advanced planning theories focused on the relevant topic of planning in and for high-speed urban change. Exhibitions and a lively, sophisticated discourse centered on three main questions:

- How can planners act effectively and responsibly in situations of urban (hyper) dynamism? What are successful and unsuccessful response patterns and which instruments are effective?
- How can best practices planning and implementation (low-carbon eco-city planning, social inclusion etc.) to mitigate challenges and harness opportunities of high-speed urban change be ‘fast forwarded’?
- What processes can the host country develop and apply to ‘fast forward’ spatial planning in Russia?

High-speed urban change is not a new phenomenon, yet in our present time it is ubiquitous and it occurs in various forms ranging from rapid urbanization in developing and emerging regions with a low urbanization rate to constant and dynamic re-invention of cities in developed countries to stay competitive and attractive in the knowledge economy with highly mobile investments racing around the world. In addition, planning for disaster recovery, climate- and environmental change and political systems change present challenges to effective, targeted and sustainable planning. Urban change occurs fast and planners must be even faster to offer appropriate responses.

The congress General Rapporteur concluded from the discussions five main areas to be addressed by policy makers and planners to manage and respond effectively to high-speed urban change:

1. Acknowledge significance and better understand the “speed” aspect of high-speed urban change
   a. The acceleration of urban processes, both as physical / structural and non-physical / operational changes seems to follow a general trend in which many things are moving faster. We are processing more information in shorter episodes, i.e. news, product, and investment cycles and others are getting shorter;
   b. High-speed urban change is a ubiquitous phenomenon and occurs in a variety of incidences;
   c. The inner mechanisms of how high or low speed in one urban subsystem influences the speed of another needs to be well understood to design instruments for specific intervention;
   d. Our simple “urban speedometer” measuring population over time needs to evolve into a “multi-dimensional speed indicator monitoring center” with better data, research, theory, simulation and field studies; and
   e. Combined with sharing best practices knowledge around the world, the findings and theory can lead to the development of more effective response patterns and applicable tools for policy makers and planners.
2. Rapid urbanization is irreversible and dialectic in nature: necessity and world’s greatest challenge
   a. We are experiencing a “speed record” of urbanization in the history of human civilization with an expected 2.7 billion new urbanites added in the next 40 years;
   b. Rapid urbanization is a necessity as it reduces family sizes and potentially can stabilize global population around 2050 as families are typically smaller in cities;
   c. At the same time rapid urbanization is mankind’s greatest challenge as it creates wealth and urbanites consume more resources and land and they produce more waste, pollution and greenhouse gases. At high-speed development it is more likely unsustainable urban layouts and infrastructures are planned and implemented and these will stay long term;
   d. Rapid urbanization often creates social, functional and spatial disparities. “Develop, pollute and marginalize first and fix it later” we can no longer afford; and
   e. Managing the informal sector and informal settlements mostly of new migrant arrivals is challenging. Policy makers and planners can enable social upward mobility by legalizing land entitlements and embracing self-organization processes while strategically guiding development and providing essential infrastructure.

3. Rapid urban change demands to “fast forward” best practices of integrated sustainability planning
   a. Rapid urbanization needs to be steered effectively towards low-carbon, eco-efficient livability by ‘fast forwarding’ best practices planning. Even during high speed growth, planning and implementation needs to be holistically sustainable, socially inclusive, and protective of cultural and ecological treasures. Opportunities for strategic open space networks should be seized serving as long-term ecological infrastructure and social amenities as it is inexpensive to employ natural services and to not build, while it is politically challenging;
   b. Cities’ constant re-invention to stay or become competitive and attractive in the new economy in the developed world demands responsible action to become models for urban sustainability, livability and good governance;
   c. De-urbanization, shrinking cities, economic decline and population loss demand political and planners’ attention, analysis, comprehensive planning, proactive approaches, creative involvement, public engagement and significant financial support by governments and the profit and nonprofit sectors to avoid a further downward spiral. An opportunity for endogenous economic development and a ‘post-growth’ mode ought to be promoted and piloted fast in such regions;
   d. Disasters, natural and manmade, slow or fast (hazards, wars, environmental and climate change, resources depletion) demand rapid response by cross-sector task forces actively involving victims and satisfying immediate recovery needs while strategically guiding long term development; and
   e. Rapid political change and changes in communications culture i.e. crowd sourcing through online social media offer opportunities for new ways of planning to be harnessed by planners.

4. Needed tools: “Throttles” to harness opportunities and “Brakes” to mitigate threats of high speeds
   a. Rapid urban development generates opportunities and wealth, investments in infrastructure and urban services and these effects are welcomed by planners, policy makers and citizens;
   b. Thus targeted and precise “throttles” need to be developed to accelerate the positive aspects of rapid development, such as investment marketing, infrastructure investment and good land use planning etc.;
   c. On the other hand negative effects such as social and ecological externalities associated with high-speed urban development need to be avoided, while not slowing down the positive effects;
   d. Thus specific and precise “brakes” need to be put in place to slow down and re-direct those aspects that lead to negative impacts in (hyper) dynamic urban change; and
   e. “Steering wheels” need to be applied to navigate rapid urban change into inclusive, eco-efficient sustainability.
5. Urban hyper-dynamism needs strong, trusted public-private-people alliances, locally and globally
a. To avoid “fast forward” turning into “fast backward” later, processes need to be inclusive and participatory. Strong and trusted alliances need to be built, bridging across levels and sectors of governments, with corporations, local business communities, nonprofit and private organizations with participation of citizens across social strata. Participation in all stages of decision making is needed in the next generation of cities;
b. Cities everywhere need to improve institutional capacity with cross-sector and cross-level cooperation, employing multi-disciplinary specialist teams led by planners with strategic and integrative capacities;
c. PPPs also are needed urgently to finance infrastructure and overcome public budget limitations creating public and private win-wins (public wins and private investors win). Including citizens in these partnerships may create lasting support of the arrangements as “PPP” with win-win-win (public, private and people all benefit);
d. Developed world cities need to implement green economies with a change of mindsets, lifestyles and urban operations and become much more eco-efficient. Developing regions may learn from these experiences; and
e. Developed world cities need to learn swiftly from developing regions’ experience from self-organizing processes of informal economy and settlements, living in serenity with less, consuming less with less waste.

Selected congress contributions, discourse summaries and further conclusions

The congress discussed that High speed urban change can be both challenging and threatening, as social, cultural and ecological aspects may be neglected while opportunities for wealth and economic benefits are generated. A best practices case of Indonesia’s Green City Development Program was presented by the Minister of Public Works Djoko Kirmanto. The fourth most populous country on the planet with a rapid urbanization process started this ambitious program two years ago and aims to integrate sectors and disciplines for the purpose of measurable sustainable development. A balance between rapid urbanization while being sustainable is one of the objectives. The current and targeted ecological footprint has been quantified vis-a-vis the bio-capacity for the major islands of the country. And 60 model cities will participate and planning and implementation is under way.

Given climate change and global resource shortages, the congress concluded that the preparation and implementation of ecologically efficient physical urban master-plans and their implementation including infrastructure and services are needed urgently all around the world and especially in emerging and developing countries where most of the world’s high-speed urbanization will continue to occur. Best practices sustainability planning needs to happen in a ‘fast forward’ fashion with the collective knowledge and capacity applied everywhere. Planners should concentrate on ensuring the new generation of urban territories and cities are livable, ecologically efficient in a comprehensive way, climate change resilient, socially inclusive and economically green and sustainable. The case of China’s recent urbanization trends and new policies was presented by Li Xiaojiang, President of the China Academy of Urban Planning in Beijing. With the annual GDP growth slowing to 7-9% as opposed to 10-13% in recent years, urbanization is likely to slow down as well. New trends include a westward move of investments and migrants returning to their home provinces creating service economies in small towns. New policies are geared towards the development of a domestic market. A more reflective mode of planning has been initiated to consider the reduction of socio-spatial disparities, develop the western regions, provide stronger urban-rural linkages, and conserve the country’s diverse and rich cultures and its ecologically sensitive areas.
It was reiterated at the congress that rapid urbanization clearly is the predominant global megatrend of our time. The main challenge for planners and policy makers is accommodating an additional 2.7 billion new urbanites within 40 years to an existing urban population of 3.5 billion people. This indeed is a speed record in the history of human civilization. One of the major challenges is informal settlements and informal economic activities, the predominant form of migrant arrival into the cities of developing regions. The question for planners is how to take advantage of community self-organization by setting an enabling framework vis-a-vis initiatives that are needed as interventions by the city. A remarkable case of Khartoum, Sudan was presented by Sharaf Bannaga demonstrating how innovative policies and management enables social upward movement through legalizing informal settlements. 360,000 land titles were granted to informal settlers migrating from the rural areas to the city and who subsequently upgraded their shelters and self-organized community services.

The congress identified public participation and institutional capacity as critical factors to manage sustainable development in high-speed environments. An example of institutional capacity and community participation was presented with the case of the post-disaster recovery following the Earthquake of 2008 in Beichuan, China. A special cross-departmental agency with broad decision-making authority was created and charged with overall planning and implementation of the recovery and redevelopment. In all phases of planning the community was asked and listened to in public participation workshops. An example: one community decided to rebuild on site while another decided to rebuild its village in a different place. This project received an ISOCARP Award of excellence.

The congress concluded that it is necessary to look far beyond physical planning. While it is a prerequisite, it is not sufficient to conceptualize, plan and implement sustainable urban territories and infrastructures. The larger than life challenge is to alter the value system, conscience, aspiration and behavior of our communities and their residents from a mode of “growth” to a mode of “post-growth” valuing quality. The case of shrinking cities with examples from Germany and the USA demonstrated how new, creative modes of planning and urban economies may be developed when cities are in decline. Proactive government programs and strategic investments to demolish / renovate / redevelop vacant housing blocks (Germany) or in community and neighborhood programs to change the landscape and economy by engaging in urban agriculture (USA) have been presented as novel ways of planning in response to these situations.

The congress host city, the industrial city of Perm is known widely in Russia also for its vibrant and avant-garde arts and culture, music and dance scene. It also is at the forefront of urban planning innovations for the country. Mayor Igor Sapko welcomed ISOCARP’s ongoing and continued various activities in the city such as academic assistance to its universities, a planning advisory team and a young planners’ workshop. Urban development initiatives, master planning exercises and real projects in the city demonstrate a new path that is underway in Perm, a path far different from past soviet-style directive planning in Russia>. A ‘Fast Forward’ towards a new age of planning in Russia is now on many experts’ minds and that will likely find its way into practice. The international planning community is invited to assist and learn from Perm and Russia.

ISOCARP would like to welcome planners to the 49th Congress from 1 – 4 October 2013 in Brisbane, Australia.

For more information:
- Order the book accompanying the Perm congress: ‘ISOCARP Review 08’ via email: isocarp@isocarp.org;
- Visit www.isocarp.org for more information on the congress, program, introductory reports, keynote speakers etc;
- Visit the paper platform www.isocarp.net for all papers presented in the parallel sessions.