

MOSCOW URBAN FORUM 2016
AND
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNERS



**URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING IN THE AGE OF MEGACITIES
- AN OVERVIEW OF GLOBAL TRENDS AND CURRENT PRACTICES**

SYNTHESIS REPORT - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following an agreement between MUF and ISOCARP in 2015, a team of six international experts studied eleven cases of major international cities as a sample of the global situation. Upon completion of the eleven separate reports, the key findings and conclusions have been compiled into a final, synthesis report. Its main outcomes are summarized here as Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations.

The purpose of this research project was to produce a global overview of the key trends in urban development and urban planning of large cities, in a manner that would assist in the management of Moscow and other big cities in the Russian Federation. The particular focus of this project is the role of mega-projects and mobility in shaping the overall urban form of megacities.

The economic, cultural and environmental significance of very large cities keeps growing. Their planning and management are among the most difficult and important political and technical tasks imaginable. Megacities dominate all major national economies with their decision-making power and financial levers; they generate the emerging global culture which defines how we live, work, consume and dream; they consume the planetary ecosystem faster than any other human creation – yet, with their concentration of population and know-how, they are our best chance at preventing global ecological calamity.

In the near future, mega-cities will have to invest trillions of dollars into new and upgraded urban infrastructure. This urban ‘project of the century’ will determine whether humanity successfully navigates the social, environmental and political challenges of the next few decades.

In an attempt to assist MUF and the Government of Moscow in being key players in the global decision making about the future of big cities, we present here the trends, issues and practices in eleven global cities. They have been carefully chosen to be representative in more than one way of the global urban scene:

1. Paris
2. Mumbai
3. Hong Kong
4. Wuhan
5. New York

6. Dubai
7. London
8. Johannesburg
9. Gdansk/Gdynia
10. Buenos Aires
11. Auckland

THE KEY FINDINGS are that:

Continued demographic, economic and physical growth is the condition common to all our eleven case studies. And, while they grow - and face an ever greater array of ever more complex problems – the ambitions for more growth do not cease. The dominant objective in all cases is economic growth - more investment, more return on investment, more jobs. Social, cultural and environmental agendas are on the wish-list too, sometimes even highlighted as the prime aspiration. However, the reality is that spatial development is mainly driven by commercial investment, which the public sector readily supports with more infrastructure. Some developments are provably detrimental in the way they exacerbate existing problems; yet they go ahead. In other cases, there are genuine attempts to produce socially responsible and environmentally restorative forms of urban growth.

Mega-projects are a prominent feature in all large cities, and megacities in particular. They come in two types: mega-projects which are site-defined – sited at a particular location in the city– and mega-projects which are function-defined – planned over the entire city (as is typical of large infrastructure projects, housing programmes, or urban greening and beautification). The role of strategic spatial master planning is critical in these projects. Master planning can either take note of the larger urban context and effectively assist in an overall strategy of polycentric development, or it can ignore the context and focus on the project’s narrow bottom line. This in the end hurts not only the social and environmental agendas, but also the project’s own long term viability and attraction. But in some cases the mega-projects have had a major positive impact on the transformation of the entire city, whether by plan, or accident. These cases show that one of the most effective strategies to implement a city-scale transformation – a notoriously ambitious endeavor because of its gigantic scale – is through a coordinated set of mega-projects.

Urban form and mobility continue to dominate the urban development discourse. Faced with the challenge of reducing their GHG emissions, many cities are combining their mobility and sustainability strategies. ‘Compact city’ has become the mainstream paradigm of an urban environment model which ticks all the boxes – liveable, prosperous, sustainable. Overall, polycentric development and compactness (density) of urban fabric seem to be the most common preferred spatial pattern, along with the aspiration to accomplish such re-configuration within the existing city rather than allowing more urban expansion. But aspirations are one thing, and the reality is another: megacities continue to grow both up and out. Urban sprawl will not go away – more likely, we will see more of it.

Urban infrastructure projects dominate the scene. The normalized 20th century view that ‘you can never have too much urban infrastructure’ appears dominant despite calls for recognizing and respecting the limits of the planet. Some projects are about supporting more real estate and little else, others are about improving public health, greening the city and restoring the ecosystem; yet, all of them invariably increase our cities ecological footprint. A radical revision of the whole idea of urban infrastructure is urgent – the purpose, the spatial configuration, the technologies that enable it.

THE KEY CONCLUSIONS after reviewing the eleven case studies are that there are some salient similarities, as well as some prominent differences, among the studies megacities:

The Similarities are:

- The enormous complexity of both the problems and the solutions. They involve multiple aspects and agents - political, governance, management, legal, economic, social, cultural, aesthetic, environmental, and security issues. This is why, typically, urban problems fall into the category known as the 'wicked problems'.
- Almost everywhere, the urban political and economic leaders' desire to be big players on the global stage and compete for investment and talent in the global race for 'smart (knowledge) economy'.
- Declarative promotion social and environmental agendas along with the economic agenda is also a common practice. But the aspiration to attain balanced development rather than crude economic growth is rarely achieved in reality.
- Dilemmas over compact growth vs urban sprawl and public transport vs private mobility are common. In most cases the former is the norm and aspiration, but the latter is still dominant in reality.

The Differences are mainly about the preference for, or the dominance of:

- horizontal vs vertical growth;
- planned vs organic development;
- short-term interest and pressures vs long-term considerations and concerns;
- economic/commercial vs environmental/resilience agendas.

It may be generally observed that the more mature megacities - which generally belong to the more developed nations and economies - prefer, and encourage by various planning instruments:

- intensification over expansion;
- strategic over ad-hoc planning;
- long-term vision over short-term gain;
- and are seriously concerned about the environmental impacts of urban growth.

An additional point in this discussion is the uneven Relevance of the eleven case for Moscow. Arguably cities need to be at least of similar size, shape and age to be comparable. Based on such criteria, it is probably fair to say that Paris, Wuhan, New York, London, Johannesburg and Buenos Aires have more significance for Moscow's conditions, than Mumbai, Hong Kong, Dubai, Gdansk-Gdynia and Auckland. Having said, it is equally true that even these cities which are either smaller, or younger, or have a different topography, have something to offer (particularly Hong Kong with regard to transport, and Gdansk-Gdynia what to do with derelict industrial sites; perhaps even Auckland – how *not* to plan for intensification!).

THE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS for the planning of all of the main subjects of this report – mega-projects; mobility strategies; urban metropolitan form; megacities themselves - are:

1. REGIONAL APPROACH - Adopt a regional scale metropolitan master plan with explicit, balanced sustainable development goals and a clear spatial strategy. Megacities are not just cities, they are regional cities, or 'city-regions'. Planning for the full extent of their territorial influence is the only way to maximize benefits and minimize costs – particularly social and

environmental. Planning satellite settlements at well-connected location outside the city proper is an important component of regional urban planning.

2. **URBAN FORM** - Compact city and polycentric development are the key concepts. They are not in contradiction – they are complementary. They will never eliminate urban sprawl, but they can ameliorate its excesses, while leaving to it what it can do well (lifestyle for those who want it, and high degree of self-sufficiency, which the distributed technologies now make possible). Large cities need many centres; intensifying selected, well-connected locations makes sense economically, socially and environmentally. Some of these centres should be outside the city proper, as well-connected but essentially independent satellite towns and villages.
3. **REGENERATION** - Focusing on reshaping the city inside the existing urban area is an option superior to urban sprawl (but it does not exclude self-sufficient satellite towns). Urban planning should identify and mobilise brownfield opportunities and foster capacities for triggering redevelopment projects in existing urban areas, as well as outside of them. A word of caution: redevelopment of disused urban sites is fraught with obstacles which are not obvious in the beginning. It requires an enormous amount of rigorous analysis before the construction can begin.
4. **MEGA-PROJECTS** - Large urban development projects are key tools in driving urban transformation, not just projects in their own right. When coordinated across the city and when master planned in harmony and synergy with the local context, they can achieve much more than just a short-term profit for the developer. They can regenerate areas much larger than their actual size; they can help in financing the public infrastructure; and they can act as models for progressive design agendas. However, it is possible that their golden era is over and that they need to be replaced by comprehensive strategies that engage with all sectors and scales of change in the city.
5. **SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE** – Climate change is a serious and growing concern. We seem to be witnessing the sustainability (mitigation) agenda being superseded by the resilience (adaptation) agenda as the paramount concern in urban planning. This strengthens the case for polycentric development and a high degree of self-sufficiency in all decisions about urban form and urban infrastructure. It also opens new opportunities for innovation and business in the areas of technology, design and planning which offer solutions.

Overall, the effectiveness of urban planning largely depends on how well integrated the planning of land use is with the planning of transportation and other vital infrastructure. Coordination between all sectors and aspects of urban and regional planning is crucial, as is the collaboration between the public and private sectors. A genuine balance between the economic, social and environmental agendas is crucial. The environmental agenda is growing in importance and complexity. It is showing a tendency to split into two distinct, though overlapping, agendas: Sustainability and Resilience. Until now, cities used to be the engines of ecological destruction. From now, they should be the engines of ecological restoration. In the not too distant future, they might become our principal vessels of survival on a damaged planet. Megacities have taken from nature more than other cities, so they should give back more.