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**Urban Governance, Diversity and Social Action
in Cities of the South**

Social Action to Build Equitable and Sustainable Settlements

**Adrian Atkinson
Technical University Berlin**

Although not a subject that interests many people, urbanists, for whom this is their focus of attention, generally perceive the global urbanisation process as being in its final stages. In the North 'rural' has almost lost its meaning, farming having become largely an industrial process employing few and erstwhile villages having evolved into chic places for middle-class urbanites to hang out. Even much of Latin America is now largely urbanised and only in Africa and Asia is the peasant way of life still a substantial feature of social and economic, if not political, life.

Even those in the North who should be taking an interest in the processes and consequences of urbanisation in the South seem largely to refuse to face the facts. Many development agencies, rather than recognising the growing importance and urgent problems associated with urbanisation in the South, have been abandoning in the most irresponsible way what in the past were in any case only marginal divisions or foci.

However, there are evident serious problems and in the medium term clear dangers in what is unfolding by way of spatial restructuring of social and economic life. The cultural, social and physical dysfunctionality of the emerging urban world involving increasing social conflict and insecurity and degraded environmental conditions are an almost universal accompaniment to the urbanisation process in the South. Informal settlements and economies are rapidly increasing in extent, defining the lives of much of the citizenry who exist on the margins of survival. In the medium-term the sustainability of this way of organising life must be seriously questioned¹.

Meanwhile, in contrast with the middle years of the 20th century it is extremely unfashionable today to think coherently about the future consequences of what is happening or of what steps might be taken to create urban societies and conditions worthy of common human dignity and which can be genuinely sustained into the indefinite future. In this postmodern world things just happen and intellect is restricted to observing from the margins², at best becoming involved in small-scale actions that aim (at least) to ameliorate the worst conditions of the poor – but avoid looking at the larger picture and thus from whence the worsening conditions emanate.

¹ The term 'sustainability' – and its equivalent in other European languages - has been so thoroughly misused in recent years to assert that whatever one wants to do is labelled 'sustainable', such that it is difficult to continue employing it without incurring serious misunderstanding. Unfortunately no clearer alternative lies readily to hand and we will attempt later in the paper to clarify what is meant here by the term.

² Bauman (1988) speaks of intellectual endeavour in postmodern society as experiencing a 'status crisis' resulting from the way that the consumer society has usurped their role as providers of "an authoritative solution to the questions of cognitive truth, moral judgement and aesthetic taste". This role is now played by the commercial media and behind them powerful enterprises in their quest for profit.

The purpose of this paper is to urge a return to more strategic thinking about the utility and wisdom of what is happening by way of urbanisation in the South and, indeed by reflection, the forms of settlement in the North, with a view to reviving coherent thinking about steering settlement patterns and processes in directions more likely to satisfy the needs of citizens into the future. It is thus necessary, to start by sketching the larger picture, looking at the forms of, and forces driving, urbanisation processes. The paper then moves on to look at the way in which global processes are not only driving urbanisation in the South but at the same time disempowering the resulting citizenry. This disempowerment proceeds via the removal of skills, knowledge and control over local resources expressed in particular through the undermining of local economies. Ownership of resources is increasingly concentrated in fewer hands with a weak sense of social and environmental responsibility. Social control over the use of resources – via government or any other social organisational mechanisms - is progressively weakened or abandoned within the framework of liberal policies.

A prerequisite to creating decision-making processes that can genuinely question and start to counter these trends is to understand social – class, ethnic etc. – complexity of the emerging cities and the different aspirations and perspectives that different actors bring to the formation and functioning of emerging towns and cities. Over the past 10 years there has been genuine progress in at least experimenting with participatory decision-making in urban management and the issue becomes: how to build this into a more coherent and effective system of governance and how to raise the sense of self-responsibility and the level of action to one that is able to master strategic decisions and not just the solutions to immediate pressing problems of survival and thence neighbourhood improvements. The paper ends by looking back over the history of utopian urban and regional planning to see how this needs to be revised to make connection into new, bottom-up governance processes where the local and regional economy, and in this context the management of local resources, is largely returned to local hands.

Urbanisation Processes and the Resulting Structures

Until some 50 years ago rural existence, expressed in a multitude of different cultural forms, defined the lives of the vast majority of humanity. Notwithstanding the Rousseauian idea that urban life represents a moral decline of humanity³, the idea that 'urbaneness' is superior to 'rurality' is nevertheless deeply embedded in Occidental – and indeed in Oriental – culture. The terms 'politics' and indeed 'civilisation' are each built on respectively the Greek and Latin terms for 'city' and the term 'idiot' (and hence Karl Marx's reference to 'rural idiocy') derives from the ancient Greek term for 'peasant'.

Perhaps this is obvious in so far as all manner of aspects of status have been embedded in the urban context. Emperors, kings and all manner of power structures, surrounded by their entourages and administrators, inhabited and emanated from cities. Religious leaders and their edifices and those who manufactured goods out the raw materials obtained from the countryside, together with traders and financiers also gathered together to build cities. Wealth and power concentrated in cities attracting those with ambition or simply seeking a 'better life' in the terms of their own cultural universe.

However, there were also important cultures that did not encourage urbanisation, including the herdsmen of central Asia and, most important, Hindu culture, with its networks of specialised villages that diffused spatially most of what in Europe and the

³ Marx (1964) indicates via historical analysis that whilst today Rousseau is seen as the exponent, even the inventor, of this notion, he was in actuality doing no more than reiterating an ancient idea.

Orient drove the urbanisation process forward. We might in the abstract ask if urbs are *necessary* to achieve the 'good life' or might they even detract from it for a significant portion of humanity? But in practice we can see an important ingredient of the spatial distribution of people is the structure of cultural practices worked out in particular environments over millennia of human evolution⁴.

A very different perspective sees cultural evolution as being driven by the increasing employment of energy by society⁵. From this point of view, urbanisation was until recent centuries inhibited by the diffuse nature of energy sources and difficulty of supplying concentrations of human activity. The rapid changes in the configuration of spatial distribution of populations in the North over the past two centuries are clearly related to changes in the exploitation of energy sources. Early industrialisation led to the accumulation of populations near water power resources and thence, much more forcefully – epitomised by the UK but also evident later in the 19th century in Germany and the US – to coal fields as the energy source powering the industrial revolution and with it urbanisation.

The invention of electricity and the rapid construction of electricity grids in the 1880s radically changed the nature of the urbanisation process. Trams and thence rapid rail systems allowed for a huge increase in the contiguous area⁶ that cities could occupy and the industries, now relatively footloose, could return to the centres of political power and the traditional civilising processes. The final development in the industrialised North happened following the Second World War with the ubiquitous spread of the car and highway-based transport. This coincided with the final stages in the industrialisation of agriculture and the diffusion of much industrial and some major service facilities across the erstwhile countryside to give tapestries of dense and less dense urban development over vast areas dependent on vast inputs of (non-renewable) energy to function.

Jean Gotmann's major study 'Megalopolis' was the first attempt to understand this phenomenon as it was occurring along the north-east coastal region of the US – subsequently known as 'Boswash'. But increasingly the phenomenon was seen to be expressed in metropolitan complexes right across the United States. Historic analyses indicated that in fact the process had been ongoing since the late 19th century in the sense that the core and thence the progressive rings of suburbs went through a phase of development, peaked in terms of population density and thence declined⁷.

This process also took place in European cities and regions, albeit displaying the more advanced dispersion two decades after it became evident in the United States. Europeans remain coy about the de facto 'end of rural' – what Sieverts refers to as 'Zwischenstadt'⁸ or 'towns between cities' - that in the end make up interlinked urban conglomerations right across Western Europe with, in practice, urban living culture and conditions as prevalent in erstwhile villages and towns as in the ancient city centres and more recent suburbs. Whilst urban planners across Europe have considered it their duty, often backed by relevant legislation, to defend the rural from urbanisation, the reasons for

⁴ Whilst one of the earliest known urban cultures was that of the Indus valley, it seems the subsequent evolution of Hindu culture did not continue in this direction.

⁵ See in particular White (1959), Odum (1971), Debeir et al (1991) and Smil (2000).

⁶ Warner's (196..) meticulous study of the growth of the 'streetcar suburbs' of Boston in the last two decades of the 19th century illustrates the point. However, by the end of the 19th century there were few cities of any size anywhere in the world that did not possess trams and European cities were everywhere facilitated in their growth by this means of transport (Mellor (2001))

⁷ Clawson (1971, 34) presents graphs for the cities of Cleveland, Boston and St Louis, indicating the universality of this phenomenon.

⁸ Sieverts (1999)

this remain romantic, rather than objectively critical: the idea of unspoiled countryside and the rural way of life remains a strong vision. The actuality of the lack of economic relations between cities and surrounding regions and the dependence of the whole configuration on non-renewable energy resources, whilst sometimes included in the argument for urban containment, are not, however, in practice coherently analysed or confronted.

This is not to say that there is not, at the same time, a continuing culture of living in cities. Even in the United States – especially in New York but also to a lesser extent in most US cities, there are, as well as the urban poor, middle classes and elites who choose to live in apartments or renovated houses in city centres. This is more the case in continental Europe (and also in Latin America and China discussed further below) that urban living traditions continue. Indeed, there has even been some revitalisation of city centres: ‘gentrification’ as a movement wherein the young middle classes began to reverse the long deterioration of inner urban housing, started in the 1960s such that in the case of London, the long decline of population across the middle years of the 20th century was strongly reversed in the 1990s. This has not, however, reversed the broader tendency of populations and economic activities to become, overall, more dispersed across the erstwhile rural landscape.

All of this sounds as if urbanisation is but an epiphenomenon of inner forces of cultural, social and economic evolution – or the evolution of the availability of energy - with no attempt at application of the human intellect concerning what might in practice be a form of spatial distribution of human settlement and activity that would better satisfy human needs in a sustainable way. Whilst on the surface this seems almost overwhelmingly the case, particularly in recent decades, there is nevertheless enough evidence that, when a society generates the will, cities and their rural contexts can be and are planned in a conscious way to provide for the reasonable needs of all citizens. It is useful at this point to remind ourselves of some good examples⁹.

Little is known of Harappan culture but what is evident in the remains of their cities is that some 4,000 thousands years ago the need for urban sanitary infrastructure was recognised and cities built in ways that facilitated their efficient management¹⁰. It seems the great knowledge of technology and health we have today was not necessary to perceive of simple ways to obviate basic urban problems.

The Greek and Roman colonies show more than a functional attitude to infrastructure. Miletus in Asia Minor, was sacked in 479 BC and Hippodamus, a citizen of the city - sometimes called the ‘Father of Urban Planning’ - developed rules which he convinced the Milesians to adopt in the rebuilding of their city and which were subsequently adopted by a much wider citizenry. These rules governed the overall structure of the towns with regard to the location of key structures and spaces and then the general infrastructure serving the residential areas. These rules governed the foundation of over 60 small towns around the Mediterranean and visiting the sites of some of these colonies provides a salutary lesson not only in the potential efficiency of planning but also the way in which the particular character of the site can be used to bind the public into the drama of the surrounding landscape. Furthermore, these colonies were reproduced out of a policy to maintain the scale of community. With the growth of populations over two centuries, towns were not encouraged to grow but rather to spawn new communities on new sites.

⁹ The following paragraphs are derived from Morris (1994)

¹⁰ As Sir Mortimer Wheeler put it (cited in Morris (1994, 33): “the high quality of sanitary arrangements at Mohenjo-daro could well be envied in many parts of the world today.”

The Roman Empire also involved a process of urbanisation of hitherto un-urbanised peoples. Thousands of legionary camps were built based on the same master plan, many of which developed into permanent towns. Rules governed the construction of these 'colonias', involving, like their Hippodamian predecessors, effective infrastructure (often impressive water supply systems and sewerage/drainage), the appropriate siting of the main buildings and spaces and symbolic monuments such as triumphal arches, and street layout appropriate to serve as a basis for residential construction. Similar rules were applied at times through subsequent European history, arguably the most impressive of which were those governing the foundation of well over a thousand cities in Latin America governed by rules perpetrated by the Spanish Crown. Enough of these survive as inner cities of what in many cases have become endless megacities to see what a planned city can do in terms of creating an efficient and pleasant living environment.

Even the 20th Century had its highlights in terms of thoughtful planning of human settlements that successfully obviated many of the serious problems that the urbanisation processes today are facing. True, the British New Towns may be criticised today for not adequately addressing the issue of excessive use of energy – and in the end for not succeeding in creating the self-reliance originally intended as a consequence in great part of the lack of foresight regarding the changing structure of industry and employment¹¹ - nevertheless, many positive lessons can be learned from the attempts, especially in terms of the strategic notion of appropriate size and containment. There may well be even more significant lessons to be learned from the construction of over a thousand new towns in the Soviet Union the experience of which awaits a comprehensive evaluation

Of course, in the face of the fact that cities have more often than not simply happened, 'organically', with minimal planning – and, once there, the reorganisation of which has proved to be a greater challenge than almost any society has been prepared to face - we must ask ourselves under what circumstances it becomes possible to 'design' cities, why societies that once planned stopped planning and, of course, whether designed cities are necessarily superior to cities that just happen. These questions cannot be asked in general but only in relation to particular circumstances. What can, however, be said is that a coherent planning of the built form depends on many factors that have themselves little to do with construction. Above all, there has to be a broad social agreement – at one extreme via authoritarian dictat but in principal, alternatively, through widespread tacit or active social agreement and what become vernacular sets of planning rules. To an extent such rules have prevailed in many if not most places in certain aspects of the built environment, in market or town squares and in the form of individual houses and their agglomeration into villages and towns. 'Planning', however, denotes a qualitatively more coherent level of agreement.

Finally reference must be made to the extremity of two aspects of urbanisation today. The first is the sheer scale of our settlements that seems to cow the planning imagination into a refusal to take responsibility. In the North we see the piecemeal nature of planning interventions that manage to keep the cities more or less functioning (albeit with massive inputs of energy to accomplish this). In the South, plans are made but observed only in a few, superficial gestures, as the growth progresses at a hectic rate, uncontrolled and observing few rules and in practice deeply dysfunctional in terms either of efficiency or to the creation of a humanly secure and pleasant environment. Perhaps the process is inherently 'out of control'. However, in today's globalising world there *is* a logic and a control over certain dimensions of what is happening that actively discourages effective spatial planning which we will look at in more detail as this paper progresses.

¹¹ Hall et al (1973)

Globalisation and Urban Development in Asia and Africa Today

As noted in the introduction, today the 'urban', at least in the North, is ubiquitous where it is difficult to say where 'urban' ends or, indeed, if there is anything other than urban. In this respect, it becomes tenuous to gauge current urban form against those of the past in that one is not comparing like with like. One of the most coherent and vociferous critics of the modern urbanisation process, Murray Bookchin, in acknowledging this, asks what has been gained by 'global cities' over against traditional cultures of appropriately scaled cities, civic life and citizenship and a clear contrast between urban and rural¹². This is, indeed, a question that needs to be asked: against what criteria should we judge the 'universalisation of the urban' in the manner in which we are experiencing it today? Can we really point to some kind of urban ideal that is superior to this?

Until recently the transition of the bulk of the population to living an urban existence was restricted to Europe and North America such that, just 50 years ago some eighty percent of the world's population lived an overwhelmingly rural existence as peasants, employees of rural enterprises, those providing immediate services to these populations - and their families. Before embarking on a more extended critique of the spatial reorganisation of human settlement and activity, it is necessary to look in a little detail at the processes and mechanisms that are driving it: it is not very useful to criticise the end result without some knowledge of how the process works.

Cities sprang up in history in various civilisations quite independently one from the other. Over the past 400 years, however, we can say with some certainty that these traditions have been submerged in 'global processes' that have resulted from the progressive extension of European and thence Occidental culture to the furthest corners of the world¹³. The mechanisms that are driving urbanisation in the South today, however, look very different from those that drove the process in the North. Crudely speaking, urbanisation in the Occident was accompanied – or driven – by a simultaneous process of the reduction in the demand for rural labour (increasing efficiency of farming methods) and demand for urban labour from the process of industrialisation and the growth of accompanying services. With few exceptions – notably the 'Asian Tigers' and the Yangtze and Pearl River Deltas in eastern China – current urbanisation is not associated with industrialisation. Here are a number of factors other than industrialisation which combine to drive the process forward¹⁴:

- The traditional values of subsistence amongst erstwhile peasants are being undermined by intensive exposure to the values of urban society. This is proceeding simply through primary education but accelerated through access to television and the ease, through the extension of transport systems, with which cities can be visited and seen as a potential alternative set of values. Peasants – subsistence farmers - are being encouraged to want to join!
- In any case in many regions increasing population densities reduce the amount of produce per individual per unit of land, amounting to a steady impoverishment.
- At the same time, areas where peasants have in the past made a reasonable income from selling primary produce, are also receiving less money as a consequence of

¹² Bookchin (1974, 1987)

¹³ Atkinson (2001, 2004) analysed in detail the European ideological roots and Occidental practice of the extension of power that gave us present day urbanisation processes; this is therefore not repeated here.

¹⁴ Bryceson et al (2000).

consistently falling prices of such produce due to mounting international competition in a regime of free trade. This, also, is impoverishing.

- Plantations and mines in rural areas that in the past were major employers in certain instances, are increasingly efficient – both per se and to compete effectively in the face of falling commodity prices - and hence require less labour; in some areas land-ownership is becoming more concentrated and plantations, whilst more variegated in what they are producing, nevertheless requiring little labour, in some cases displacing erstwhile subsistence farmers.
- In some countries civil conflict is leading to ‘internally displaced people’ (IDPs) looking for safe havens that generally means urban areas.
- ‘Natural’ disasters including drought, flood, etc. are encouraging rural populations to look for safer places to live.
- ‘Aid’ money spent in rural areas, whilst widely intended to support rural communities in situ, is in practice often introducing hidden incentives to flee the land.
- Increasing populations in the South are coming to depend on remittances from relatives working in the North; these are generally received in urban areas where the means to spend them is also more readily available.
- Although the numbers of urban poor are growing with the urbanisation process, in most countries of the South rural poverty is more widespread such that it seems that opportunities are better in urban or urbanising locations than in the countryside.

None of these can be said in all honesty to be positive reasons for rural populations to urbanise but all of them are contributing to urbanisation as being seen to be more likely to provide better security, incomes and/or lifestyles than is available in rural areas. In fact when analysing the growth of existing cities, immigration of rural populations is only part of the story: cities are also growing from the net internal increase in population.

The form of urbanisation is, however, clearly different from that experienced in the history of the North. In a sense it is, rather, emulating the more recent spatial redistribution of population in the North without going through the progression of urbanisation – suburbanisation – ex-urbanisation which characterised the urbanisation process in the North. Villages are in some cases depopulating whilst others are growing into towns. The transport infrastructure – and cheap petroleum - are playing a key role here: new kinds of ‘villages’ are in many cases – and this is true across much of Africa, Asia and Latin America – simply strips of development along regional highways. ‘Peri-urban regions’ are particularly favoured with new forms of urbanisation, with the extension of road transport out from the city into the countryside.

On the one hand the peri-urbanisation process involves the relocation of poor populations forced out of the cities by increasing densification of the cores and through eviction – active or passive - via direct or indirect economic pressures. On the other it involves rural populations finding incomes in serving the needs of the larger regional economies including those of the old city cores and of the suburbanising formal urban developments (middle class suburbs, commercial and recreational facilities, industries, etc.). New peri-urban settlements in the regions around older cities are in some cases growing into enormous labyrinths of informal housing with minimal urban services.

Urban Economies of the South

It is evident that the conditions in which large sections of these urban populations are living in are far from satisfactory. Most readers of this paper will be aware at a minimum of pictures of slums developing sometimes in the centres but increasingly on or beyond the periphery of cities or even in open countryside. The most recent, authoritative overview and detailed analysis of this situation is given in the UN-HABITAT bi-annual report on urbanisation focusing specifically on the issue of urban slums¹⁵. The situation is, to an extent, recognised by the international agencies and particularly the World Bank, with 'upgrading programmes' and from the year 2000 the financing of the 'Cities Alliance' with its goal of eliminating slums by the year 2020 and, as a component of the seventh Millennium Development Goal directed to ensuring environmental sustainability: "to achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020"¹⁶.

Notwithstanding the question of what level of habitat is deemed to be no longer a slum, it is contended here that the goal of radically improving conditions in the growing urbs of the South is hopeless unrealistic without some thorough analysis of the causes of the problems and thence developing mechanisms for treating the causes and not the symptoms. In the first instance we take a hard look at the situation faced by the growing urban populations of the South now and continuing along the present path. We then look at some of the key factors that might usefully be considered to result in a more realistic path to improving the lives of urban populations of the South.

It can certainly not be said that industrialisation produced, from the outset, pleasant urban conditions for the rural populations that underwent rural-urban migration in the North in the course of the 19th century. On the contrary, it is well-known that, particularly in the UK where the process started, the living conditions in the industrial cities were quite horrifying¹⁷, well beyond the worst conditions found in southern cities today. Eventually, however, industrialisation – in conjunction with social movements that forced a redistribution of the wealth generated by industrialisation – did produce the economic means to improve life for all but small minorities of urban populations in the North.

It is contended here that it is the weakness of urban economies – or shall we say the distorted access to, and unsustainable use of, resources - in the South that is a major reason for degraded living environments that will continue to be such – and worse – well into the future whilst the current international economic regime prevails. In the middle years of the 20th century, when the present development institutions were founded and the ideology of development came to be provided with machinery (the founding of the World Bank, the UN agencies – especially the UNDP – and the bilateral development agencies) there was almost a universal assumption – an essential ingredient of the Occidental ideological hegemony - that eventually all countries would industrialise and urbanise and that industry would bring to the 'underdeveloped' world all the 'benefits' experienced by the 'industrialised' world¹⁸, eventually in some version of the 'American Dream'; a house in a garden in an ex-urban setting, bound into the wider world through the mobility provided by the private car.

¹⁵ UN-HABITAT (2003)

¹⁶ The Subcommittee working on the development of tools to implement the Millennium Development Goal concerned with urban living conditions is more realistic in calling for programmes that improve somewhat the living conditions of those already living in slums whilst reducing the growth of new slums.

¹⁷ This is standard background in texts dealing with the origins of modern urban planning, but the book-length description of these conditions written at the time by Frederick Engels (1974) still bears reading.

¹⁸ There is a substantial literature from the 1940s to the 1960s concerning development that rests on this assumption – see Agarwala and Singh, (1958) for a selection of papers by some of the best-known ideologues of development from this era.

Industrialisation is happening only in very restricted areas in the South for two inter-related reasons. The first is simply that modern production machinery has become so productive that most of what is needed in terms of industrial products can be and is being produced with relatively little labour. The second reason, related to the first, is concerned with the control and thence the distribution of industrial production. Whilst transnational corporations had been incipiently increasing in power across the 20th century in determining where and how production should take place, over the past 20 years, within the framework neo-liberal policies progressively forced on southern countries, the power of transnational capital has become overwhelming in securing the freedom to move and exploit wherever and however they please.

Over 80% of international 'trade' in value terms takes place within corporations, moving materials and goods to production locations and thence to markets. Although factories to finalise goods for local markets may be regionally distributed (final assembly of cars, filling consumer materials into containers, etc.) the main centres of production have become increasingly centralised. Although the production system as a whole is predominantly financed and controlled by corporations headquartered in the US, Europe and Japan (the Fortune 500) the main location for industrial production is increasingly East Asia: over the past few years almost one third of all foreign direct investment (FDI) from the North has gone to just one country, China¹⁹, with its endless supply of cheap, efficient and hard-working labour.

Most countries of the South are of little interest to northern investors except for minor investments in specific industries that make little impact on the overall need for investment as the basis for effective economic development: software production and call-centres in India, clothing manufacture in Bangladesh and Poland, cross-border 'maquila' production in Mexico which is tantamount to being in the United States but with considerably cheaper labour, of course all manner of agricultural produce relevant to different climatic conditions, etc.

On the other hand, southern countries are targets for the sale of produce of northern enterprises. The sheer efficiency of production of all manner of goods on the part of transnationals, plus the influence of advertising enables these to undermine local production in terms of conquering markets. Tastes are changed through a barrage of advertising and the soft-sell of Hollywood movies and soap operas to conform to what transnationals have to offer. The result is the decline and even collapse of locally controlled production in most of the countries of the South and an increasing dependence on imports decreasingly direct from the North and increasingly from regional production centres as is to the best advantage of the northern corporations.

As noted, the reason for no longer locating production in the North is because corporations wish to take advantage of cheap labour²⁰. The process of urbanisation outlined above is resulting in huge pools of potential labour looking for an income from which to buy the means to live. This is exacerbated by the neo-liberal rules forced upon countries by the IMF and World Bank ('structural adjustment'²¹) that reduce the capacity

¹⁹ Including Hong Kong but not including other parts of South East Asia where ethnic Chinese manage the industries in question: if this is included, we are looking at half FDI being into Chinese managed industry!

²⁰ As the Director General put it in his 2001 annual report: (ILO, 2001:54): "...the comparative advantage that some countries enjoy by virtue of a relative abundance of low-cost labour has been affirmed as a legitimate advantage in trade..."

²¹ Whilst, since the early 1990s the IMF and World Bank have ostensibly abandoned structural adjustment for 'Poverty Reduction Strategies', The United Nations Conference on trade and Development (UNCTAD (2002)) recently commented that: "A close examination of the macroeconomic and structural adjustment policy

of governments to attempt to maintain employment levels and provide the support of social security systems. People have to work for a living and if jobs are so few then they compete in what the ILO refers to as a 'race to the bottom'. Transnational corporations can find any amount of labour in the South at less than living wages and there is no reason for the countries or, more accurately, the people of these countries to even hope that at some stage wages will rise in the way they did in the countries of the North across the 20th century without a fundamental change in the regime of production and the control which national and local governments can exert over key dimensions of economic management.

It is currently estimated that throughout Latin America and Africa on average around ten percent of those seeking employment will find a job in the 'formal sector'²². Without unemployment benefit systems it becomes necessary for the rest to find some other means of obtaining money with which to buy the means to live. The result goes under the title of the 'informal economy' and it is here that we can now find the majority of working people earning a living in the towns and cities of the South. The structure of urban informal economies is complex and difficult to analyse in its lack of structure involving many in earning money from various sources, in some aspects outright illegal and hence hidden. Major components of this economy include informal vending, informal means of transport, work put out by formal enterprises without security, informal recycling of the leftovers from the rich and entertainment for the more affluent including prostitution²³. For the most part incomes are pitiful – although there are dimensions that can earn more than is paid in the formal economy and hence is preferred – which isn't saying much given, as we have just seen, how poor pay can be in the formal economy.

The net result for the cities and lesser urban entities is that there is very little money circulating in the system with which living conditions can be improved. Large populations living in slums have no money to pay for improvement (materials or labour) and the cities have little income to invest in infrastructure. Indeed, whilst much is said of corruption and poor management in southern cities, it is amazing to see what is achieved with such meagre resources. Unfortunately, quite generally the investments that are made tend – in some respects overwhelmingly - to favour the more or less small percentage of the population that continues benefiting from formal economic activity.

This includes the comprador class (complete with eg drug Mafiosi) that facilitates the deepening penetration of northern economic interests, including those servicing the international tourist industry, the (with few exceptions) diminishing class of manufacturers, politicians and their entourages (senior civil servants) and professionals. There are in this process ever growing economic differentials between the rich minority and the urban poor²⁴. The 'middle class', that was supposed to be the condition of everyone at the end of the development process, is disappearing²⁵.

It should be clear from the foregoing that the urbanisation process in the South is at the same time a process of radical disempowerment and growing dependence at all levels. The levers of power, the skills and the knowledge of the past necessary to organise a more independent way of life are slipping ever further away from the inhabitants of southern countries and their systems of governance (referred to as 'the growth of

contents of the PRSPs shows that there is no fundamental departure from the kind of policy advice espoused under what has become known as the 'Washington Consensus'."

²² ILO (2002)

²³ Atkinson (2001a)

²⁴ Interestingly the growth in differentials in recent years has been more marked in the North than in the South (ILO (2004)). For the US, see: Peterson (1995).

²⁵ ILO (2004, 44)

ignorance²⁶) – in the worst case (Somalia) with 80-90% unemployment, total dependency on remittances and ‘aid’ with much of the population permanently on drugs²⁷. Erstwhile peasants are decreasingly able – or even interested – to provide for themselves. The urban poor – although participating in consumption of internationally traded goods in the few products they can afford to buy as displayed in even the poorest stalls in slum settlements - do not have the means either to supply their own needs adequately or to access any economic or political structures that might help them to improve their position²⁸. The artisanal classes²⁹ and manufacturing bourgeoisie are no longer in a position to supply more than marginal ‘niche’ markets and the rest of the benefiting classes sell themselves short to international corporate and political forces in a lifestyle that is utterly dependent on imported resources for almost everything that makes up their comfortable lives (cars, office and home equipment, most consumer goods and materials including food).

It is necessary to focus on the question as to the causes of this disempowerment. At one level it is clearly a question of the global competition of corporations to win markets and make profit and the way in which, through neo-liberalism, they have usurped political as well as economic power³⁰. This has certainly been facilitated by the end of the struggle for ideological hegemony of the 20th century where the United States insisted that ‘capitalism is superior to communism’. Whether unsuccessful in its own terms or not, communism at least aspired to create a rationally organised world that would satisfy the human needs of all. The logic of capitalism, on the other hand, as expounded by its great ideologues (above all Adam Smith) is that we should not concern ourselves with trying to organise the ideal society because the process of capital accumulation will do this better than any attempt to accomplish this through our rational efforts.

Looked at today, we might be wise to be sceptical of Smith’s optimism. However, from the perspective of the ‘post-modern condition’³¹ we can also say that the process has taken on a life of its own. The sheer virtuosity of the production system to flatter our desires in presenting us with a deluge of commodities and situations – especially the desire to be on the move - such that the world of our dreams becomes reality, is, at the same time, a kind of inebriation that blunts our criticism of what is unfolding. We are drunk on consumption and, what we also need to be aware of, drunk on the material base of this consumption, namely oil.

Thus at this point it is pertinent to revisit the issue of energy dependence of the whole process outlined above. Already in 1971 Howard Odum, inventor of what became the standard method for analysing energy flows through ecosystems, applied this to human economic system and in passing commented that "(t)he great conceit of industrial man imagined that his progress in agricultural yields was due to new know-how in the use of the sun...(t)his is a sad hoax, for industrial man no longer eats potatoes made from solar

²⁶ Hobart (1993)

²⁷ Atkinson and Couté (2003)

²⁸ A few enlightened mayors – eg in Durban and Bogota – are at least recognising the legitimacy of informal trading but finding it extremely difficult to improve their situation without close support by central governments and far broader strategy and consistent set of policies that will combat the international economic logic in a coherent way.

²⁹ One area where southern manufactures still have an edge is in artisanal goods. There are significant markets for these in the North but competition is, as in other areas, extreme, resulting in the overall income from these being, with few exceptions such as Bali and some Indian cities, extremely meagre.

³⁰ Barnett and Cavanagh (1994), Chomsky (1999), Greider (1997), Hertz (2001), Kelly (2001), Korten (1995)

³¹ Although intellectual fashions move on, it is worth revisiting the literature of post-modernism of the 1980s and ‘90s that analysed this state of our society. See Harvey (1989), Boyne and Rattansi (1990), and particularly the work of Zigmunt Bauman (1987, 1988, 1991, 1992.).

energy; now he eats potatoes partly made of oil."³² The Pimentels then went on to gather together a mass of studies that had been made into the use of energy in agriculture and were able to contrast non-solar energy inputs to traditional agricultural systems with the increasing amounts of fossil fuels being used to produce and deliver food to the American table³³. The modern food production and distribution chain is by no means the most energy intensive part of our production and distribution system but this is illustrative of the way in which non-renewable energy use has insinuated itself into every part of modern life.

Global analysis of the use of non-renewable energy sources³⁴ indicates clearly the way in which the evolving restructuring of production and lifestyles has progressively involved increasing energy use. The vast majority of this increase is from fossil fuel sources; indeed the use of biofuels, potentially renewable, has been diminishing as a consequence of new urban populations of the South, however poor, adopting fossil fuel sources for their relatively diminutive energy requirements³⁵. In recent years there have been signs that at least European countries have been mildly reducing their energy needs but this is a deception looked at globally because it has involved the transfer of energy-intensive industries to Asia – and the use of energy in Asian countries has been growing at a phenomenal rate³⁶.

Looking in detail at the evolving uses of energy it is immediately clear that the major part of the global increase in energy use is in transport – which is the sector most dependent on the use of fossil fuels and, indeed, specifically on petroleum. The international restructuring of industry and a related increase in trade (that is to say movement of materials and goods) is premised on the ready and extremely cheap availability of petroleum (fuel for ships, aeroplanes and road vehicles). The urbanisation processes underway in South – and even more markedly the restructuring of the spatial distribution of activities (above all lifestyles) in the North – are also being accompanied by a rapid increase in the per capita use of energy for transport.

Most striking is the increase in use in those countries to which the productive activities – and with them increases in per capita income – have been gravitating. South Korea, for instance, increased energy use in the transport sector by a factor of six between 1960 and 2000, with a per capita energy use overall increasing from 0.39 to 3.0 tons of oil equivalent per annum (toea) – over 95% of which is imported³⁷. The equivalent figures for Brazil between 1970 and 2000 were a four-fold increase in transport energy use and a per capita increase in energy use from 0.63 to 2.0 toea. Whilst these measurement units might mean little to most of those reading this paper, they nevertheless are understandable to the lay person in terms of illustrating the growth of energy dependence.

Analysis of per capita energy use for a wide range of countries plotted against levels at which a range of 'social goods' are present indicates that it seems as if modern life can be lived satisfactorily per capita on 1.5 toea. Western Europeans, however, consume over four toea and US citizens over eight. In so far as the increasing use of non-renewable fossil fuels is concerned, it thus seems that the North is the problem, rather than the South. However, it is clear that the urbanisation processes and increasing

³² Odum (1971, 115-116)

³³ Pimentel and Pimental (1979)

³⁴ As a start, the BP annual Statistical Review of World Energy at www.bp.com provides a concise overview of evolving patterns of energy use globally and regionally.

³⁵ IEA (2003)

³⁶ Setiyawan et al (1996)

³⁷ In 1960 South Korea was a classically 'underdeveloped' country with a high consumption of local biofuels and only 20% of energy sources imported.

economic dependence of southern countries is also tying them into this energy system. 1.5 toea is not a necessary amount of energy but an amount that relates to our lifestyle at the end of the urbanisation process.

Finally it is necessary to stress the problems associated with this energy situation. These are well-enough known and yet thoroughly detached from any meaningful analysis of the causes of the problems and consequently of any realistic solutions. On the one hand the use of fossil fuels is systematically increasing the proportion of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere, resulting in increases in the 'greenhouse effect' which, in turn, is leading to 'global warming'. This does not mean a general rise in temperature but rather complex changes in climate. Where this will end is unknown but is thought already to be resulting in extreme weather conditions which in time will alter ecosystems – adding to their impoverishment in line with other human interventions in nature resulting from the spatial reorganisation of human activity certain aspects of which are the main concern of the paper.

The second major problem is that some time in the future fossil fuels will be exhausted so, prima facie, we cannot continue to rely on them. If we really wish to continue the current trajectory of global development, with its continued rise in demand for energy, then other sources of energy will have to be found. Renewable sources are available but need to be developed and whether they can realistically take over the current trajectory of growth in energy use is extremely unlikely and unthinkable in the time left to make the transition before petroleum production starts to decline. True, natural gas remains in relatively abundant supply for longer than petroleum and coal even longer. Both of these can be adapted (converted) to substitute for petroleum – albeit in the latter case with substantial increases in negative environmental impacts. Discussions come and go as to exactly when exploitable petroleum resources will start to decline – and hence prices rise steeply - but best estimates are that this is a matter only of one or two decades into the future.

Although recent history has shown that certain energy transitions can be made relatively rapidly³⁸, it is highly likely that the start of the decline in petroleum production will result in massive disruptions to the global economic systems as the price of moving of goods and people escalates. There can be little doubt that the increasing economic dependence on the global production system and the urbanisation processes currently in train in the South are increasing greatly the vulnerability of southern societies to the negative impacts of such a shock. It seems evident that the solution to this problematic lies in devising production and spatial distribution systems that radically reduce the need for energy. This issue is incorporated into the consideration in the last part of this paper of a renewed focus on strategic initiatives in spatial planning.

Governance of Emerging Urban Regions

The term 'governance' was until recently a little-used term with vague connotations of the running of society in all its aspects. That is to say that 'governments' have major responsibilities to organise aspects of the way in which societies work but that other organisations – notably private businesses, all manner of associations and so on also provide structure for other aspects of the way in which societies work. We can be sure that the concept of governance has come to the fore in recent years as a consequence of the diminishing of government. This diminishing was initially a consequence of the

³⁸ The transition to alcohol as vehicle fuel, managed by the Brazilian government in the 1970s, was impressively rapid. Of course the US government might choose the same route as petroleum supplies decline: to use grain produced in the United States that is currently a major source of supply of the world's food, to produce alcohol so that Americans can continue their car-based lifestyle!

aggressive way in which the organised private sector promoted neo-liberal ideology, asserting that during much of the 20th century governments had usurped the role of private initiative in many areas where this was not deemed to be legitimate. Thus the regimes of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan spoke of 'rolling back the state'³⁹.

At the same time, starting already in the early 1970s, a range of other kinds of non-government organisations surfaced which, during the 1980s, went under the title of 'new social movements'⁴⁰. These came to be interpreted broadly as the representatives of 'civil society' over against governments and the private sector, harking back to the political philosophies of the 18th century where civil government had first been justified as the way in which European society (and with the spread of Occidental culture, the rest of humanity) should be governed by 'democratic' regimes. Whilst now widely used as a term to describe non-government self-organisation and initiative of all kinds, the concept of 'civil society'⁴¹ remains fluid, as does the concept of 'governance'. We need to look more closely at the structure of 'civil society' in terms of its key dimensions if the concept is to have any analytical utility.

It is certainly useful, as a preliminary to any constructive approach to combating the problems raised so far in this paper, to look in some detail at the issue of social differentiation. Without such an understanding it becomes difficult to make recommendations that are likely to have any effect: the fact is that cities are made up of groupings that have very different visions and strategies concerning what they are trying to achieve out of the situation they find themselves in and how they go about this⁴². Thus if a project aimed at obtaining a consensus to plan the future of economic and spatial organisation is to be successful then it is necessary to understand how the society acts in ways that enable us to break down barriers and achieve a common language and common basis of understanding of the predicament we are in. In the first instance we need better to understand the nature of differences in the growing urban agglomerations and how different groups see the world and relate to one another. We do well to start from conventional approaches to such an analysis and see where we go from there.

'Conventionally' the structure of (urban) societies is analysed in terms of classes, of ethnic and related groups (including race and religious divisions) and familial relations ranging from age and gender roles to extended family and thence patronage structures that extend affective relations into the wider world. We will look briefly at each of these for their usefulness to the subsequent discussion.

The concept of class – of society being divided into different economically functional groups - is different from society to society and, particularly in Occidental history, has been undergoing changes in recent times. Caste – including in feudal Europe – is clear about what functional role people should play and how this fits into a status hierarchy. Society becomes a machine with no real 'leadership' but rather an interaction of classes the net result of which yields the functionality of the whole to deliver the needs of all individuals. The transformation of Occidental societies from feudalism through 'the estates' to, over the past two centuries, a struggle between a vision of a classless society versus the forces of conservatism to maintain the privilege and prerogative of some – either traditional elites or new bourgeoisie - over others, has been the great socio-political drama of recent history.

³⁹ Gamble (1994), Hall and Jacques (1983).

⁴⁰ Eyerman and Jamison (1991), Giddens (1994), Melucci (19..) etc.

⁴¹ Keene (1988), Cohen and Arato. (1992), Hann and Dunn (1986)

⁴² Balbo (1993)

Already the French Revolution threw into question the legitimacy of class differentials and across the 19th century, utopians, socialists, communists and anarchists insisted that everyone should have an equal right to access resources and a good life. This crystallised out in the early 20th century into the set-piece notion of class conflict in which owners of capital and those who work for capital negotiate the means to elaborate the capacities and direction in which society might develop.

There was in reality substantial difficulty in interpreting class within this framework in any objective fashion in that actual economic classes possessed nuances and complexities that could not legitimately be shoehorned into the simple framework of (economic) rulers and ruled⁴³. It was as if there were players and onlookers watching to see which vision would triumph: the interests promoting a 'liberal' society or those pursuing a society without privilege or prerogative, without significant economic differentials. States adopting 'communist' regimes asserted that class was no longer an issue and whilst economic differentials were certainly substantially diminished in these countries, these nevertheless maintained definite privileges amongst a de facto elite.

Liberalism - and thence neo-liberalism that seemed from 1980 on to have won the battle - denies the existence of class, this being a means to obviate the debate and hence the capacity this might have to (re)assert the moral legitimacy of egalitarian society. Liberal policies of northern countries quite generally (and in spite of the pretences that things have not changed, viz 'social-democratic' political parties exercising power) have resulted in growing economic differentials⁴⁴. It must be emphasised that liberalism is not simply oblivious to class differentials. Whilst it has no interest in returning to some form of caste society, it nevertheless harbours the belief that some people are better than others and that this superiority should be rewarded in life, conversely that other people are undeserving of the benefits of society and should be disciplined to accept their inferior position⁴⁵.

The question that becomes relevant to this essay is: does this matter and if so how are we to interpret class in a way that will help address the problematic outlined in earlier parts of this paper? It is asserted here that this *does* matter for the following reasons. Caste – and indeed any form of class society - fragments the social understanding of predicament. In so far as caste societies in the past found a modus vivendi that – if we take the Indian version – more or less provided for all in a sustainable fashion, then we might say that we have no right to fault it.

Modern society is, on the contrary, one that is in rapid motion towards what seems – it is difficult to avoid – a denouement of catastrophic proportions. It has found the means to be 'rational', through the physical sciences, concerning the exploitation of the physical world but has fatally lost the understanding and hence power to control the socio-political forces driving the whole process forward. Run on the basis of competition with de facto classes that have very different partial visions of the world they live in as a consequence of specific, rather than general, positions they occupy, there is no incentive within the socio-political process on the part of any group (and the society as a whole has no centre of intellectual gravity that might undertake the task) to solve the problems ahead. We can usefully refer indeed to 'class cultures' and to the irony that class conflict has been reduced by a common metaculture of consumerism that encourages concern with

⁴³ A substantial debate arose in the course of the 1960s and 1970s attempting to objectify the class structures of Occidental societies, generally in pursuit of advancing the case for egalitarian societies (Poulanzas (1974), Giddens and Held (1982) Wright (1985, 1989))

⁴⁴ In fact this 'slide' could already be detected in the 1960s but has become more marked in recent years (ILO (2004, 44))

⁴⁵ I discuss the ideological foundations of this belief in Atkinson (2004)

personal consumption and a very weak notion of a common fate and the need to organise in order to defend or promote the wellbeing of anyone but oneself and one's immediate affective world.

The spatial redistribution of functions characterised as urbanisation (and more recently suburbanisation and ex-urbanisation) in the Occident can to a certain extent be interpreted as having a definite class dimension. Towns and cities were relatively small until the 20th century, with class-distinct quarters. The urbanisation process involved urbanisation of rural populations for whom quarters were built as they were inducted into the industrialisation process – albeit for at least a generation continuing certain rural practices including the keeping of animals and a disregard for sanitary practices.

In some European countries the social democratic consensus really did attempt to erase the distinction between classes in spatial terms⁴⁶. However, class culture expressed itself much of the time through lifestyles: with the rich living in large, individually designed, houses in spacious suburbs whilst the lower classes lived more densely in urban quarters in tenements and as constructed during the third quarter of the 20th century, in high-rise 'social housing'. Class, when caste lines are loosened, releases a tendency for the lower classes to attempt to emulate the rich and thus the process of suburbanisation and ex-urbanisation has involved the spread of lower density housing into the countryside in emulation of the rich but generally still spatially separated. It is this culture that is clearly most dysfunctional from the point of view of the sustainability of the whole – as is recently recognised in an accumulating literature advocating urban re-densification⁴⁷ which, however, fails to discuss the dimension of the class drive behind the de-densification process of recent years.

The extension of Occidental culture to other parts of the world has on the one hand taken with it Occidental class cultures but imposed these on existing class cultures yielding complexities particular to each region and even each city, over which it is difficult to generalise. Everywhere there is an upper class that is effectively integrated into this same class in the Occident, who largely share its values and lifestyle. There is then an intermediate class that shares much of the culture of its equivalent in the North (especially in Latin America which might be classed in this sense as Occidental, given the European origins of much of the population). But most important from the point of view of this essay is the way in which 'traditional' rural cultures have been urbanising through the processes described earlier in this essay, forming urban quarters that transfer aspects of rural culture to urbanising areas in often highly dysfunctional ways, both because of a lack of awareness of the exigencies of urban living and because they fundamentally lack resources to do otherwise.

This brings us to the issue of ethnicity including race, religion and related cultural entities and the role they play in urban areas. The term Ghetto originates in the way in which Jewish communities were granted rights to settle in European cities at the end of the middle ages which initially was a valued right but in time became the name for a defensive community with separate identity where the population experiences discrimination. Ghettos are a common characteristic of 'outside' communities that come to occupy specific economic niches because the inhabitants bring particular skills or propensities, because of religious and other moral requisites or because they are forced into roles by the exigencies of the society into which they have migrated. Even when more dispersed – not living in Ghettos - ethnic communities generally occupy clearly defined economic roles which therefore are relinquished by the mainstream society.

⁴⁶ The extreme case being where the Swedish Prime Minister lived in 'social housing'.

⁴⁷ Breheny (1992), Williams et al (2000), Jenks and Burgess (2001)

These can persist over generations to become tantamount to castes within what otherwise are not caste societies.

The best example to illustrate the way in which ethnicity can operate in a dynamic way and yet contribute to the fragmentation of the society can be seen in the evolution of urban societies in the United States⁴⁸. The urbanisation process in the US was strongly determined by the process also of industrialisation and the immigration of groups from many European countries resulted in cities becoming in some cases predominantly clusters of Ghettos surrounded by more socially homogenous suburbs. Although comprising a classic industrial working class, each group possessed its own community organisations, churches and businesses servicing their ethnic needs and tastes, all competing for control of the key political positions. Although persisting for two and three generations – in some cases maintaining their own languages – these became largely dispersed into mainstream suburbia, across the class spectrum, as a consequence both of restructuring of the national economy and in flight from the rural-urban migration of black population and the immigration of Latin population. American society, however, remains significantly marked by ‘ethnic niches’ in the economy in terms both of particular industries occupied by particular ethnic groups and also within companies where different ethnicities play particular roles in the overall hierarchy of the company.

The urbanisation process in the South in so far as it follows the new patterns outlined above – of strip development along regional highways and agglomerations condensing out in per-urban regions – these tend to be ethnically homogenous. But the older cities are everywhere increasingly complex in terms of ethnic groupings and the way in which these deepen cleavages in the socio-economic structure of the cities. An extreme case can be seen in the oil-rich countries of the Middle East. Here in some of these cities quite small indigenous minorities are served by a complete class hierarchy that involves Arabs from neighbouring oil-poor countries, Asians and Europeans, each group occupying particular economic niches in a fixed hierarchy expressed in different incomes, the whole being politically subordinated to the indigenous population.

A different case is presented by Southeast Asia where a more or less small Chinese minority owns much of the capital whilst remaining politically subordinate to traditional elites whilst possessing economic freedoms well above those of the mass of the indigenous people, in a kind of class sandwich⁴⁹. A similar case appears in some African countries where Indian and European communities play important economic roles in the modern sector beneath a small indigenous elite but above the large indigenous majority, itself usually fragmented into tribal groupings with their own division of labour, religions and languages. Thus ethnicity reinforces the problematic of class in the sense of fragmenting interests and the possibility of creating a shared culture necessary for concerted and united action to confront the problems with which this paper is concerned.

A final issue to be dealt with here concerns the way in which affective groups operate within societies and come to dominate urban political power, excluding majorities of all kinds from access to decision-making or to economic resources. In the first instance, there are traditional patterns of family structures and allegiances (but including also sometime internal enmities). This may be seen as a mechanism, very strong in most traditional societies – indeed continuingly so in most societies with the exception of the Northern European and North American – by which welfare is distributed from individuals benefiting from the economic and power system to their affinity group. Whilst this might be seen as functionally beneficial – even necessary – amongst poorer people, amongst

⁴⁸ Ward (1971)

⁴⁹ Seagrave (1995)

the rich and powerful it becomes the key to understanding why countries and cities that have such great potential in resource terms remain so poor and dysfunctional.

Neotism and beyond this patronage structures with their 'big men' and their 'entourages' – the system as a whole being termed 'clientalism' - are primarily machinery for looking after the needs – and desires – of 'insiders' and hence are crucially disinterested in servicing the needs of the wider community. Ethnic communities outside their place of origin almost always cohere through such structures and can forge powerful political and economic positions via this mechanism. In the case of the urbanisation of the United States, ethnic communities produced Mafiosi and 'political machines' systematically absorbing and centralising resources in the hands of particular ethnic groups.

But it is also true of elites right across the non-Occidental world evidenced by the way in which relatively small numbers of families, intermarrying but at the same time competing, dominate political and economic power with similar and usually interconnected structures across the country, in particular cities and in lesser geographic entities. Ultimately this is sanctified through traditional religious leaders, nobilities and monarchy. In the final analysis it is these structures that are the main inhibition to a broader process of inclusion in terms of decision-making and economic equality. It must be pointed out already at this stage that what goes for 'democracy' in most southern countries is in practice the continued rule of traditional elites and new elites governing through patronage systems.

Now that we have investigated the fragmented nature of the emerging cities of the South, it remains to ask how we might go about creating a consensus and commitment to change directions around a realistic analysis of problems. In recent years much has been said about the need for participatory decision-making and everywhere some effort has gone into interpreting this and trying to turn it into a reality. The result comes under various names and involves various procedures – one text identifies and briefly describes over 20 different approaches⁵⁰. Visioning, Future Search, Planning for Real, Local Agenda 21: each of these methods as practiced across literally thousands of communities in the North today purports to include a range of community interests in a decision-making process in which 'sustainable development' is one, if not the main, target.

This interest in 'participatory decision-making' also has its champions in development work in the South – often in political climates that are potentially and sometimes actually hostile to the idea of involving common people in decision-making that essentially usurps or at a minimum diminishes the power of established or elected elites. It is seen as subversive or worse as 'communist'. Already in the 1970s the International Labour Office was developing a method referred to as Participatory Action Research (PAR)⁵¹. At the same time a method of rural participatory planning, Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)⁵² was being experimented with. This subsequently was extended into a method that could also be used in urban areas.

Indeed, in many northern countries these methodologies, in so far as they are concerned with 'sustainability' have been promoted by local authority associations and in some cases have become either strongly recommended by central governments⁵³ or even mandatory⁵⁴, generally under the title of Local Agenda 21. The European Commission has both provided guidelines and incentives, financing the Sustainable Cities Campaign,

⁵⁰ NEF (1997)

⁵¹ Rahman (1993)

⁵² Chambers (1983)

⁵³ For instance in the UK – Manchester City Council (1995)

⁵⁴ The case of Sweden

with major events aimed at reviewing progress and exchanging experiences with those organising and involved in the processes. The first major conference took place in Aalborg in Denmark, resulting in the oft-quoted 'Aalborg Declaration'. This was followed by a major event in Lisbon two years later and a further event in the context of the Hanover World Fair 2000. Aalborg again hosted a conference under the title of Aalborg plus 10. The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), founded in the lead-up to the UN Conference on Environment and Development of 1992, has both promoted and monitored the spread of LA21 processes which had reached something approaching 2,000 local authorities by the early years of the Millennium⁵⁵.

Meanwhile, development agencies have also been adopting such procedures either in certain projects or even as a basis for project implementation. 'Stakeholder analyses' identify the people and institutions that need to be involved in projects or programmes. Consultation exercises are undertaken, community representatives are trained in local planning and project execution with some funds or funding mechanisms being put in place for plan implementation. UN and bilateral development agencies have promoted numbers of programmes, some referring to LA21 and with similar structures under other names⁵⁶. In general the urban and rural versions have been pursued with little interaction but with similar approaches.

It is necessary to scrutinise these in the light of the foregoing analysis of the fragmented nature of urban societies today to obtain a perspective on what has been achieved relative to the overall need. Regarding the LA21 and related processes in the North, it may be said that there are a few examples of genuine attempts to make an impact on unsustainable lifestyles⁵⁷. Broad organisation around key issues – for instance the need to radically reduce the profligate use of energy⁵⁸ – exist, hold conferences, have active web-sites but attract only tiny groups that take them seriously in terms of changing practices.

Projects are contained within localities and the process has made almost no impact on pre-existing urban management. 'Participation' is one of the basic principles but none of the many methodologies used make any more than gestures to analysing the ethnic and class structure of cities and show absolutely no understanding of affective structures and thence to develop processes that will penetrate into the fragments and obtain genuine involvement. Whilst local politicians have often been involved in and promoted these processes, there is no indication of local elites, who have greater resources that might be redirected, opening their world up to the notion of participatory decision-making. 'Participatory planning' in the North involves small, - often enthusiastic and committed but nevertheless marginal – groups that have yet to discover the complexes of the societies they are trying to change and hence the need for complex strategies to move beyond their own ghettos.

Private corporations may make small donations but there are few attempts⁵⁹ to question the activities of the corporations with regard to their contribution to sustainable cities or,

⁵⁵ ICLEI (1997). Also: the international journal *Local Environment* publishes articles describing LA21 and related initiatives.

⁵⁶ Atkinson and Allen (1998)

⁵⁷ For the more radical end, see the web site of the Global Ecovillage Network www.gen.ecovillage.org. More mainstream presentation of sustainable projects is to be found amongst the 'Dubai Awards' promoted by UN-HABITAT. See www.dubai-award.dm.gov.ae.

⁵⁸ eg the Post Carbon Institute (www.postcarbon.org) and the Carfree Cities Network (www.carfree.com)

⁵⁹ The EC introduced a procedure under the title of Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) wherein companies could analyse and report on their own activities on particular sites with a view to progressing in the

more broadly, the competitive ethos within which they operate. The plans made become no more than window dressing, proven by the fact that overall statistics indicate little change in such basic parameters as resource – particularly energy – use. Furthermore indications – such as the reduced attendance at the Aalborg plus 10 conference and the reduction in local authorities with active LA21 processes – are that, in spite of a very broad recognition of the unsustainability of current lifestyles and the organisation of economic activity, LA21 processes are nevertheless treated as ‘last year’s fashion’.

In the South, the problems to be addressed are more basic, present and pressing. ‘Sustainable development’ might be a problem of the coming decades but, already today, poverty and degraded living environments cry out for immediate attention. Thus are participatory processes in the urban South focused on engaging the poor in improvements in immediate surrounding largely on the basis of self-help. No attempt is made to extend the processes out to incorporate other fragments of the urban society. Little attention is paid to the way in which the middle classes and elites are adopting the unsustainable lifestyles of the North and where this is the case, this suffers from similar problems experienced in the North: the lack of a framework to evaluate and prioritise what is genuinely sustainable, what kind of society and cities can be realistically created over a longer time span and how current resources can be redirected to achieve this. Just as in the North, it is evident from the wider statistics that these initiatives are almost nowhere substantial enough to change the direction of trends towards an unsustainable urbanisation with increased use of non-renewable resources and with increased insecurity and conflict resulting from the obvious exploitation and/or disregards of the needs of the disadvantaged by those who possess access to power and wealth.

Rebuilding Local Economies

It is a major contention of this paper that the if ‘participatory planning processes’ are to make a significant impact then they will have not only to address the issue of social fragmentation but to do this via a strong focus on the economic dimensions of unsustainability and the growth of poverty and related degraded living environments. It is a strange anomaly that is in part a question of tradition that urban planners pay little attention to the way in which urban economies work even though, prima facie, the health of the urban economy says much about the health of settlements as a whole. Even more anomalous is the way in which the World Bank and with it other development organisations fail to address urban poverty issues as a function of failing urban economies.

Behind all of this perhaps lies a refusal to look critically at the lifestyle of urban elites – and even middle classes – who have no desire for the light to be shone upon their priorities and the way they want to live their lives. Thus in the North participatory planning processes are tolerated at the margins as long as they ask no important economic questions and in the South as long as they focus on charity work amongst the poor. It is necessary to be clear about how these processes have been contained, that it is necessary to break the bounds in which they are contained and, in the current jargon, to ‘mainstream’ participatory planning that is takes genuine responsibility for the current and future health of human settlements.

Perhaps we need to recall Chairman Mao Tse Tung’s approach to creating a consensus for change, in the first instance assessing with whom we can start the process⁶⁰. This was

direction of more sustainable production, but without any overall framework – and in the end with very few companies participating.

⁶⁰ Mao (1957)

realistic in understanding that it will not be possible to appeal to some 'general public' on the basis of 'common sense' that points out the unfairness and unsustainability of what is happening around us. It is a matter of extending the 'stakeholder analyses' to a deeper understanding of the necessity to work in the interests of a multiplicity of groups, understanding the ways that these operate within themselves and how an approach to change might appeal in different ways to different groups. The advertising world has taught us – in a negative way – that we cannot rely on rational explanation to appeal to interests but must become involved in creating engaging images not simply of the badness of what is happening but of the goodness of the future one is trying to promote. This is the semiotic dimension of the project and although the following paragraphs set out a rational process of organisation along the lines of conventional PAR, LA21 etc., the semiotic dimension must be utilised in any attempt to walk this path, as a powerful means of breaking down the walls between and within the fragmented social substance.

It is becoming clear not only to the economically excluded (actors in the informal economy) that the economic system is dysfunctional, but also to many entrepreneurs at the level of the small and even medium enterprise level. As these are the people who are supposed to subscribe to neo-liberalism as being in their interests, it is extremely important that they should be amongst the first to be recruited into any project to construct an alternative approach to local economic development. However, remembering that 'businessman' might mean many orientations depending on the nature of the business, such a recruiting process needs to be aware of, as Chairman Mao put it, distinguishing between who are our (potential) friends and who are our enemies. But the role of conviction is crucial and the battlefield here is at the level of understanding what is actually happening in the world as a prelude to joining in the project of building a new kind of world.

The process needs to be sold on grounds of rationality – sustainability and a less violent society - interest, moral and political correctness and sheer aesthetics (a nicer way of life). There is need for clarity from the outset that the local/regional economy needs to be protected from aggressive external competition and be inherently tending towards redistribution (creating work, empowering through the development of skills). There is then a series of steps in the process of constructing such an economy which are only sketched here but which at least touch the main points that must per necessity be adapted to particular places and situations.

- A very wide spectrum of groups need to be brought into a structured decision-making process. This may have as many as three levels: a broad forum that disseminates information (propaganda) to all constituencies aimed at creating a consensus across many fragments of the city/region and opening groups out to an orientation of participation; a council that involves key actors – but also marginalised interests such as occupied in informal activities – that defines the scope of the initiative; and an executive that maintains the pace of organisation and formulates legal and institutional structures
- The initiative must be oriented from the outset not only towards a conventional idea of the local economy (production, income and profit earning activity) but equally to consumption patterns (lifestyles). The planning process is centrally about building economic initiative primarily to satisfy local – or sub-regional – need as explored and developed through the activities of the forum.
- A 'critical knowledge' of the structure of the local economy must be developed as a basis for discussion and planning. What potential local human and physical

resources are there, who owns them and what do they choose to do with them, what is locally produced or provided, what is imported to satisfy local markets and who controls their importation to the region. But also what do different groups actually consume with a focus ranging from the super-affluent to the deprived and what might we on the one hand define as superfluous (flaunting privilege, unsustainable) and what needs are failing to be met through lack of access to resources? What is the structure of employment and of currently available local skills?

- Consideration of the ultimate sustainability of the regional economy must be incorporated from the outset in the process of planning for changes in local production patterns. Regional physical resources need to be understood in an ecological (self-reproducing) framework – with a major focus on energy (using less, managing it more efficiently, changing over to renewable sources) – but focusing also on feed and water, inputs to all kinds of industry and building materials.
- The initiative cannot pretend to change things overnight or separate radically from ongoing economic activity. It must move step by step to provide local needs and through this displace step by step markets served from outside; to de-escalate unsustainable lifestyles and raise the level of resources amongst the disadvantaged. In the first instance demonstration initiatives with a high likelihood of success (wide commitment) need to be undertaken but at the same time longer-term strategies and plans must be developed.
- Self-education of forum members and through the forum the local population is crucial. This will mean building local self-consciousness and new forms of local culture that choose selectively from tradition but are prepared to forge new cultural features as an essential approach to breaking down walls between social fragments and dissolving the inward-looking ethos of clientelist structures. This will focus on ‘detoxification’ against the aggressive advertising and sales of externally produced products and services. Local media must be developed or captured and a scepticism of the importance and status of externally provided messages built up.
- There will everywhere need to be training and education in skills relevant to new local/regional economic development initiatives ranging from knowledge of the potential of local resources (use and conservation) through technological capability and the development and use of technologies appropriate to place and capacities, to planning and administrative skills.
- Pragmatism is needed with regard to the structure of economic initiative. In the long run various social forms of ownership would be encouraged, rather than separating entrepreneurship from productive activity. But whether cooperative or municipal initiative or local community-owned should not be an issue from the outset. The ethos of individualist entrepreneurial competition needs to be progressively displaced by the ethos of cooperation. Experience should direct preferred forms in the longer term.
- Equally the financing of economic initiative should be relatively pragmatic, making use in the first instance of pure private sector and government but within a strategy of accumulating locally-controlled financial mechanisms and from the outset using such mechanisms as LETS, credit unions, cooperatives, etc.

Of course such a local process will not proceed without influence also on legal and political structures well beyond the sub-regional boundaries. Local and sub-regional fora need to exchange experiences and where they find problems resulting from laws,

structures or influences at a regional or national level, should join to combat these to recapture their own powers to decide. Obvious targets from the outset are national laws favouring national and transnational businesses (everything from tax breaks and subsidies to legal frameworks).

This must come into conflict with rules accepted by governments in the framework of international trade law as administered by the WTO. Regions adopting this paradigm will need national – and eventually international – organs to influence policies and the development of laws at these levels. This will not happen, however, unless there is a firm understanding from the outset of the dysfunctionality of liberalism and unfocused ('free') trade relations and the need to develop a consistently cooperative and largely self-reliant regional economy⁶¹.

But although the step by step process set out above may seem logical as a way out of the problems we face it is in reality no small project. Just as Greek philosophy lost its way in the lee of the magnitude of the Alexandrian ambitions and triumphant progress across Asia, collapsing into a meek expression of hopeless quest of a personal morality of asceticism, so today the scale of globalisation cowers us into submission to the sheer, brazen success of capitalism in conquering the world. And we are silenced in awe of magnitude of the panorama which this presents and in consequent paralysed in the face of the catastrophe that this 'success' must bring in its wake...

Future Urban Settlements

We might think that the reconstruction of local economies, being already a very substantial move against the drift of things and already addressing the issues of growing urban poverty is enough in itself. However, we cannot stop here in our quest for a sustainable and socially healthy society: the amorphousness of megacity regions and the difficulty of defining areas to become self-reliant, the ease with which, in the absence of such definition, the sheer scale of the areas involved and the problems which they face is liable quickly to lead to loss of direction and thence to defeat. Perhaps we are already witnessing this in the diminishing of enthusiasm for Local Agenda processes. The processes aimed at local economic reconstruction should thus be seen as the start of a larger process, lending a sense of going somewhere that then needs to be utilised to ask the question: going where?

At the outset of this essay, some space was given over to affirming not only that it is, in theory, possible to plan the distribution and structure of human settlements but that history shows us times and places where this has been effectively done. Societies have collectively decided that they wish to organise their settlements in a particular way to serve their needs and have gone about thinking through how best to do this and then putting it into practice. We are in great need of a shift in our collective consciousness that will escape from the fatalism – the liquid modernity of today⁶² - and take hold of the means to determine how our future will be organised.

The procedure set out above for reconstructing local economies will inevitably ask questions about what is meant by 'region' and need, in each case, to come to some meaningful conclusion. There are socio-political approaches to answering this and then there are ecological approaches. The 'bioregional movement' has attempted to incorporate these into a new vision of culture that goes back through history: how did our

⁶¹ These ideas are not isolated but relate to a broader debate that can be accessed in the first instance via the web site of 'PareCon' (participatory economy) at www.parecon.org. See also Albert (2004)

⁶² Bauman (2000)

region obtain the resources needed by its people and how did they organise themselves to live sustainably with this resource base? Although this may be one facet to be taken into consideration, in many regions of the world, the configuration of settlements and the uses of the environment are far, far away from their historic configuration and starting from today cannot be thought of in any way a march back through time, even if this were genuinely desirable. This does not mean that this dimension should be entirely abandoned: we do need to look back critically at our history, particularly with respect to possibilities of living sustainably within our region.

A second line of investigation must be to recognise that in the past much thought has been given to 'ideal' ways of organising our communities. Utopia may be out of fashion and derided as being 'no place' because it is either unreachable or worse is authoritarian. There is a huge literature particularly generated by the 'cold war' that asserts the impossibility of positive utopias⁶³. It should be clear that the idea of Utopia is something of an opposite to the idea and the liberalism and this has been explored by many at the level of idea, of philosophy⁶⁴.

Utopian thinking has an exceedingly rich history in Occidental culture⁶⁵ that does not have parallels in any other culture. It is clear that this is one facet of the Christian apocalyptic and the idea of progress that has evolved out of this. We can look in two ways at a world that progresses, that changes from one year to the next: we should be able to – in the framework of science - predict the future and this, indeed, was the force that supported socialism throughout the 20th century: the Marxist conviction that we *know* that the future will yield an egalitarian society. The collapse of communism threw this belief into deep question which is precisely the foundation of the force with which liberal fatalism has come to dominate the present era.

But the other interpretation of the idea of progress is that we can and must take the future into our own hands and make it the way we want it to be. It is this interpretation that is urgently needed to be grasped and activated if we are to overcome the vast problems created by the current drift of social irresponsibility and insecurity and the unsustainable – we should say in the medium term simply unrealistic – (ab)use of resources that is associated with present day lifestyle aspirations. The drift towards what, at the outset of this essay, is termed 'urbanisation' is clearly part – indeed a fatal part – of the problematic. This is not to say that urban living is necessarily bad or unsustainable but that the way in which it is proceeding at the present time certainly is.

So efforts to re-localise economies must progress to discussions about the way in which the economy, including consumption patterns, should be organised spatially to best contribute to overcoming social fragmentation. Utopians would refer to the creation of egalitarian, solidaristic societies where the reasons for current escalating violence and conflict are eliminated and the possibilities for cooperation as a basis for effective social decision-making in the interests of present and future generations are realised. Critical review of models drawn from the history of Utopianism can help, and need to be revived. But actual Utopias will be different for different societies and regions and will need to be generated in specific participatory processes of the kind outlined in the previous section of this paper. It is unlikely that there will be a return to nomadism amongst sedentary nomads, but the possibility should not be ruled out by the imposition of a single model. However, it might be speculated that urban systems, in contrast to the recent past where the majority of humanity lived in rural settlements, are in all probability the main form of

⁶³ The critique of the possibility of Utopia is particularly associated with Karl Popper (1945).

⁶⁴ Kateb (1963)

⁶⁵ Manuel and Manuel (1979)

settlement of the future: the technological means are available to allow for the majority to live in towns and one can envisage the social decision-making process confirming the present day urbanisation drift. That megacities will be part of this is, however, unlikely: there are good reasons why Utopias have usually opted for regions were networks of small and medium-sized towns and cities, self-reliant to a point appropriate to size.

Utopian thinking about future settlement patterns cannot be left to physical planners as happened in the 20th century attempts of the new town movements across Europe. The creation of Utopian settlement patterns must grow out of processes of social and economic restructuring that, if and as these develop confidence in their capacities to realise more congenial and controllable social and economic arrangements at the local level, then graduate to thinking about the physical structure of settlement pattern in the particular ecological and resource setting. This becomes the model for the 'urban and regional planning' of tomorrow, Utopian as ever, but grounded in new social processes aimed at transforming the structure and orientation of social and economic process.

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