FUTURE PERSPECTIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

How can urban planning and design help governments be more effective in promoting/achieving fair and sustainable development in their societies?

Laura Alejandra Garcia

Roberto Rocco

Approximately 54% of the Earth's population reside in cities today. The United Nations forecasts an increase of 66% of the world's population living in urban areas and 95% of this urban growth is occurring in the emerging economies of Africa, Asia and South America. (Timmeren & Henriquez, 2015) The current model of urban development is attached to the current model of economic development, which is based on the untamed consumption of natural resources, squeezing every last drop of the Earth's supplies. Do I have your attention? We are reaching the limits of the current model of urbanization and production. Therefore, we are in a crossroads: we must either change our models of development completely or we must accept the consequences of our past and present actions and as a specie, confront a future of deprivation and instability. Whether we wish to talk about sustainability or not, we need to acknowledge that sustainability is fundamentally about the choices we make about the way we manage our cities and our societies and the associated consequences to our planet. (Larsen, 2009)

Figure 1, 1.1

The urgency of changing the current paradigm of development lies on the instability generated by social inequality, on the unfair distribution of economic and natural resources, but most importantly, on the fact that the explosion in urban growth is happening on developing countries. This is because, besides confronting the challenges of rapid urban growth itself, countries in the Global South must face extra challenges of fulfilling the basic needs of their populations, while confronting inequality, fighting against corruption, following a very doubtful path for development. Therefore, our question is: What is the model of development countries in the Global South ought to follow in order to achieve sustained and sustainable growth, and reach social, economic and environmental success?

In this article, we will explore the notion of sustainable development in relation to urban development in the Global South. Next, we will discuss three ideas that come from the interpretation of different strategies that have been applied to urban contexts in developing countries, and we use them to explain different tools and approaches to achieve a more sustainable urban development. These three ideas are: rural vs urban; mega cities vs secondary cities; and the social dimension of sustainability. And we will end this text with a brief conclusion, in which we raise more questions and attempt some conclusions resulting from this query.

Defining sustainability

In 1987, sustainability was defined in the World Commission on Environment and Development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs." (Larsen, 2009) Five years later, in 1992, the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, added to the definition of sustainability that "it needs to be considered fully from its social, economic, and environmental dimensions." (Larsen, 2009) Sustainability is the most crucial concept to understand our future and face the problems we have today. Sustainable development is the development that provides a complete view of human development, based on four pillars of our societies: public and private economic prosperity, social inclusion and cohesion, environmental sustainability and governance of major players. These pillars are important because they show us the urgency to have a holistic vision of what a good society shall be, in terms of economy, environment, society and politics. (Sachs, 2013)

Regarding the definition of sustainable development, some further explanations have been made in different fields that focus on this holistic view. In the World Urban Forum (2014), an international conference dedicated to urban issues, organized by the UN-Habitat in the city of Medellin, Colombia, different governments made a call for a general reflection on the need to rethink our lifestyles and change our current model of growth. Joseph Stiglitz, the 2001 Nobel in Economics, talked about the possibility of building an alternative world and that now is the time to take a new path for development. For Stiglitz, "to achieve livable cities or cities for life, is necessary to create a sense of solidarity and community. For addressing inequality, you can begin now to address some of the worst manifestations of it in cities. You can make sure that the next generation has:"

1. Efficient public transport systems

2. Job Growth

3. Education for all

4. Affordable Housing

5. Healthy Cities

6. Social Protection

7. Civic Culture (Stiglitz, 2014)

Stiglitz states that these are the most relevant issues to build cities for life, based on understanding what is most important for people. These elements are the result of asking three questions: What are basic values? What are we looking for? How can we achieve that which we are striking for? Unquestionably, the current model of development cannot continue its current course and the need to rethink an inclusive and supportive system is more urgent. Societies are constantly reinventing themselves, in response to the changes in economy and society. (Stiglitz, 2014)

An example of reinventing society due to the change of politics and mentality can be seen in the city of Medellín, Colombia. Everyone is talking about Medellín, and this is because after being one of the most unsafe and violent cities in the world in the 1990's, it is now one of the

most innovative cities, with a high improvement of civic conduct, appropriation of urban spaces and development of the city itself. By a model of urban renewal called "social urbanism", the city has applied small scale strategies to improve the quality of the public spaces and as a result, the society has responded in a positive way. One specific example is the Metrocable, a system of public transport that connects the Metro system to the highlands of the city. By providing infrastructure to the slum neighborhoods, Medellin is striking for a better social inclusion. Related to this project, the city is building public libraries and parks that connect the mobility nodes to the urban life of the poorest areas. These urban strategies can be applied in the local scale and will work perfectly on a large scale. In the case of Medellín, by strengthening the local identity, the groups of individuals in the society are confronting the problems in their urban living based on a cultural unity, given by the improvement of the urban and public spaces.

Figure 2

Figure 3

Rural vs. Urban

We must understand that the development of our urban centers depends on the rural fields that are left behind and abandoned during the process of urbanization. The fact that the urban population will increase over the years and our cities will increase density and size, does not mean that rural areas should be neglected. On the contrary, we should aim for regional development, where rural and urban are connected and not isolated from each other. The importance of this statement relies on the fact that the countryside is the engine of our cities. If we want to talk about sustainable urban development, we need to include the rural life in the cities, educate and assist the farmer's families, educate and update them with today's technologies and prepare them to propose and adapt to production strategies with the aim of a responsible consumption.

In order to achieve these goals, rural centers must be involved in strategies that ensure strong and productive regions. This is important because of three main things: these centers are the first supply for cities; there is people who prefer the life outside the city; and the region should work in an efficient way. This means that if there is a strong connection and relation between rural and urban areas, the region becomes more efficient, and the relationship towards the city will be much more sustainable and we will be able to talk about sustainable *urban regions*. If we only plan for the development of the cities, but there is still an interdependence to the rural areas, there is a lack of use of the space and the resources, which can result in inequality in rural areas. This is already happening; in Global South countries, people that live in the countryside are considered "poor", with less education, less opportunities in life. However, if these rural areas are included in a regional strategy that provides all the social services, the development of the society will be more equal and prosper.

Megacities vs. secondary cities

The second point to consider are mega-cities vs secondary cities. According to the urban dictionary, "a city and/or metropolitan area with a very high population or average density. A megacity is generally considered to be an urban agglomeration with a population of at least 10 million, though the United Nations defines it as a metro area that is home to at least 5 million people living in an area of consistent urban-level density." (Dictionary, 2015)

The megacity is a city that suffered a phenomenon of demographic explosion, resulting in the growth of its infrastructure and coverage of their services; a process in which the city expanded so much that it became inefficient. This could be the case of the city of Sao Paulo, in Brazil, a megacity that is facing an "urban crisis due to the lack of social and economic opportunities, of the high social and spatial segregation, leading inhabitants to migrate to the countryside. However, these people still commute to the city for work, family and access to urban amenities." (Timmeren & Henriquez, 2015)

The reason to consider this two aspects is important because it gives a wide view of the development possibilities. First, a megacity that has huge infrastructure, services, population and a higher level of development, but that because of these, it has become unsustainable. And second, a secondary city that has not yet undergone such transformations and can still offer a good quality of life and urban services and facilities, and is more reliant to be sustainable. They are also important engines of growth, but they must take into consideration a sustainable and regional model of growth. In order to achieve sustainable development, the dialogue between megacities and secondary cities must consider a regional plan where mobility and employment opportunities between cities are strengthened, coordination between the cities and the region is improved, autonomy is given to cities for equity - independent central government – and the network of cities across will be well connected.

Figure 4

The social dimension of sustainability

As explained above, there is an urgency to give priority to a new model of sustainable development. Nevertheless, the actions made in order to achieve sustainability generally focus on the environmental dimension only, arguing that the environment has been most affected by the fast development of urban societies. Indeed, this has happened, and we are witnessing today the changes in climate patterns caused by the intensification of the industrial era. The concern about the environment cannot be separated from the concern of having more equal societies and more sustainable economies.

First, the economic model needs to change and cannot keep profit as the ultimate goal. Joseph Stiglitz states that it is also important to ask: what is the role of our governments (in a world dominated by financial markets). "Many of the central issues that are being faced by society today (inequality, environmental and societal transformations) are arenas where market failures arrived. Markets won't be able to solve them. We cannot leave this issues that are essential for our society to the market. The only way we can create the kind of society we want, is by having an important role of the state." (Stiglitz, 2014) Governance models are also essential for the sustainable development of Global South countries. In successful cases of

development, countries of East Asia had strong governments that had the obligation of ensuring the development of their country in terms of economy, society and environment.

The social dimension, however, seems to be the essential key to obtain the economic and environmental sustainability. According to Larsen, "the cities of the twenty-first century must place the citizen at the center of public policy, reinvent the concept of the city, and realize the many ways of sharing in urban life."(Larsen, 2009) In order to address this, the "urban policies that pursue social sustainability must, among other things, seek to bring people together, to weave the various parts of the city into a cohesive whole, and to increase accessibility (spatial and otherwise) to public services and employment, with the framework, ideally, of a local governance structure which is democratic, efficient, and equitable." (Larsen, 2009)

The importance of the social dimension comes from the necessity of including society in the governance structure and in decision-making processes. As explained before, developing countries have many social and political challenges that need to be tackled, which are deeply connected to the way their cities grow. Because of bad governance, governments are facing a crisis of credibility. Citizens are deeply distrustful of governments, with terrible consequences to their capacity to think collectively and to plan for the future. Larsen states that "social action is needed to change the social order." (Larsen, 2009) This means that change will come through action and action must be initiated by actors in coordination.

Conclusion: A call for change

From the discussion above, we conclude that there is one question that concerns us urbanists: what is the role of urbanism, as a discipline, in promoting societal participation in the model of development of different countries? What can we do, as urbanists, to promote action and foster democratic participation in urban development? How can we, as designers, include people into decision-making? Aiming for sustainability, we can promote top-down and bottom-up strategies, in which citizens are involved. Participation is a tool to promote governance, because it gives to the society the right to speak and listen to each other's demands and compromises.

As a conclusion, we would like to restate the question raised in the beginning of this article: what is the model that countries in the Global South need to follow in order to achieve socially economically and environmentally sustainable growth? We may not have the right answers yet, but it is possible to say that the future of our species relies on the decision that governments in the Global South are making right now. Because of this, we believe that discussing our role as urbanists in helping those societies achieve those goals is essential.

As urbanists, we can provide society with news ways to conceive spatial interventions, in which the public sector, the private sector and civil society work together in innovative ways. We can design projects that work within in a framework in which governance is defined by innovative interactions between actors, and not only by top-down actions. And finally, urbanists from all over the world have the responsibility to help countries in the Global South achieve sustainable development, since the survival of our planet relies on their success.

References

Dictionary, U., 2015. *Urban Dictionary.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Mega+City
[Accessed 19 04 2015].

Habitat, U. -., 2014. *7th World Urban Forum.* Medellín, Colombia: s.n.

Larsen, G. L., 2009. *Understanding the social dimension of sustainability.* First ed. New York:
Routledge.

Nations, U., 2005. *World Urbanization prospects: Mega-cities.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/WUP2005/2005WUP_FS7.pdf
[Accessed 19 04 2015].

Sachs, J. D., 2013. *The Age of Sustainable Development,* New York: Columbia University - Coursera.

Stiglitz, J., 2014. *UN Web TV.* [Online]
Available at: http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/conferencessummits/world-urban-forum-7-5-
11-april-2014-medellin-colombia/urban-talk/watch/urban-talk-with-joseph-stiglitz-world-urban-
forum-7/3449523172001
[Accessed 10 05 2015].

Timmeren, A. v. & Henriquez, L., 2015. *Ubikquity & the illuminated city.* First ed. Delft: TU Delft.