Institute of Development Urbanism

Concept note

Henrik Valeur, 2016

Executive summary

The Institute of Development Urbanism (in the following referred to as the Institute) is an international think-tank concerned with the urban transition of the so-called Global South.

The aim is to raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities related to the transition from rural to urban society and to influence this transition in a culturally vibrant, environmentally friendly, human healthy and socially just direction through cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaboration, exchange and interaction that may also inform and inspire the sustainable transition of the Global North.

The Institute is a small and light organization located in alternating cities in the Global South and affiliated with partner institutions in those cities and in other places. Students, researchers and teachers, representing various cultures and disciplines, will engage with local activists, bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, journalists and scientists in order to collect, create and communicate knowledge which is based on both practical cases and theoretical studies.

Content

1. Objectives

The main objectives of the Institute are:

1.1 Awareness and influence

To raise awareness of the challenges and the opportunities related to the transition from rural to urban society in the Global South, including the possibilities for social change, improved livelihood opportunities, better education and health care and the problems of squalid living conditions, runaway pollution, excessive consumption and new lifestyle diseases, and to influence this transition in a culturally vibrant, environmentally friendly, human healthy and socially just direction.

1.2 Collaboration and inspiration

To promote cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaboration, exchange and interaction as a means to address critical common challenges, such as climate change, resource depletion and environmental degradation, deteriorating health conditions, social exclusion and cultural repression, and, in so doing, possibly also informing and inspiring the sustainable transition of the already urbanized societies of the Global North.

The city is coming to you! Mumbai, 2015. Photo: Henrik Valeur

2. Approach

The Institute is founded on the recognition of mutual dependency and a desire for mutual development (co-evolution) between different cultures and disciplines but with respect for individual differences. The approach is exploratory and experimental. Knowledge is created and collected from both practical cases and theoretical studies conducted in collaboration between people with different competences and perspectives and made freely accessible to local and global actors in the form of articles and policy papers, project proposals and practical manuals, exhibitions and documentaries, seminars and workshops.

While promoting an inclusive collaborative approach, which attempts to connect academic, activist, administrative, public and professional levels, the Institute will, at the same time, attempt to encourage critical, independent thinking.

2.1 Research

The Institute will introduce new methods of research based on an approach of “global collaboration related to local context” in which local and foreign students, researchers and teachers from various disciplines will engage with local activists, bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, journalists and scientists on projects and programs related to common global challenges and specific local situations.

Knowledge will be generated through data collection and analysis, empirical observations, dialogues and debates, conceptual experimentation and concrete actions, and be scrutinized by partners and participants before being communicated to a wider audience.

2.2 Proposals

Knowledge will also be generated through the development of concrete proposals of action, design and strategy. These proposals will be based on principles of "development urbanism".

Urban development involves multiple interests and concerns, and sustainable solutions must integrate knowledge, ideas and experiences from different cultures and a diverse range of disciplines, though these solutions must always be adapted to specific local conditions and be developed in close dialogue with local stakeholders.

2.3 Communication

Research and proposals may be developed for both local and global clients, including grass root activists and city administrations, development and environmental organizations etc.

Apart from the daily discussions of methods, ideas and results among the involved partners and participants the Institute will use the internet and make exhibitions, publications and seminars etc. in order to disseminate knowledge to, and discuss it with, a wider audience.

3. Organization

The Institute is a small and simply structured organization based on an ever-expanding network of institutions and individuals representing various cultures and disciplines, interests and competences. When fully implemented it employs a regular staff of about ten people, including:

1 director
1 research manager
1 project manager
1 communication manager
1 financial officer
1 designer
1 filmmaker
3 assistants

In addition, people from a wide range of academic fields, including arts, humanities and social science, architecture, engineering, business, health and natural science, may be involved in, make use of and contribute resources to the Institute in various forms and to varying degrees.

3.1 Location

The Institute is located in alternating cities in the Global South, shifting from one city to another every one or two years, thus continuously expanding its network, knowledge base and potential reach and impact.

The Institute will integrate knowledge collection, generation, evaluation and dissemination through various forms of collaboration with both local and global partners. It will organize and participate in various events in the region where it is temporarily located while participation in international events will be limited in order to restrict the economic and environmental costs of transportation.

The Institute will be hosted by a local partner institution, with which it will collaborate, or it will rent its own space but will still be collaborating with a local partner institution.

3.2 Process

The network of partner institutions will be grown incrementally through actual collaboration at alternating locations.

At the first location faculty and students from the partner institution of that location are invited to participate in activities together with faculty and students from the partner institution of the second location. At the second location faculty and students from the partner institution of that location are invited to participate in activities together with faculty and students from the partner institutions of both the first and the third location and so forth.

The transfer from one location to another will be planned at least one year in advance. The location will be chosen based on external advice and internal discussions, the availability of promising and challenging cases and the possibilities for cooperation and networking.

After having located suitable living and working quarters the staff of the Institute will move there and begin to establish – and expand existing – local networks. The Institute will start investigating cases and plan events with local and global partners, clients and sponsors.

4. Economy

The Institute may start out with a modest budget that can gradually be scaled up. When fully implemented, the annual operational costs of the Institute are estimated at around one million EUR/USD. At least 2/3 of these costs should be covered by long-term funding from partner institutions, donors and sponsors, while the rest may come from grants, consulting fees etc.[1]

4.1 Expenses

Activities[2]	25%
Equipment	10%
Space and facilities	5%
Salaries	50%
Transport	10%

4.2 Income

Partner institutions[3]	5-25%
Donors, sponsors	40-60%
Clients	0-20%
Grants	10-30%

5. Definitions

5.1 Development urbanism

Development urbanism is a multidisciplinary field focusing on sustainable urban development as a means of combating poverty and its many related illnesses and protecting the environment, the climate and the resources.

It addresses basic human concerns in urban settings and is particularly relevant in those parts of the world that are currently undergoing processes of rapid urbanization, but it may also inform and inspire the sustainable transition of the already urbanized parts of the world.

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[1] Potential clients, donors and sponsors may include charities and philanthropists; culture, development and environment organizations; development banks, such as the World Bank, the New Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank; educational and research institutions; the Green Climate Fund; local administrations/governments; NGOs and CSOs; research funds, for instance the European Research Council; the UN Habitat (SDG).

[2] Activities may include exhibitions, publications and seminars etc.

[3] Partner institutions may contribute spaces and facilities as well as scholarships and salaries for students, researchers and teachers.

Rather than adding an additional layer of (technological) solutions it attempts to solve problems at the root. Development urbanism can thus also be seen as an alternative to the *smart city* concept.

Sustainability is understood as a dynamic equilibrium between our own needs and the needs of others, including the needs of future generations, relative to nature's carrying capacity and society's capacity for progress.

Sustainable development, it is believed, must combine traditional knowledge, based on experiences accumulated over generations, but today often ignored, and the knowledge stemming from experimentation with new ideas. In other words, we need to recover what has been forgotten and discover what is not yet known.

5.2 Co-evolution

In biology, "the term co-evolution is used to describe cases where two (or more) species reciprocally affect each other's evolution".[4]

The Institute will promote co-evolution through collaboration, exchange and interaction between academic, activist, administrative, public and professional levels thus enabling knowledge, ideas and experiences to flow back and forth between different cultures and disciplines, locally and globally.
However, co-evolution will also be promoted through an understanding of cities, not as static machines in which everyone is assigned a specific, predetermined function, but rather as evolving ecologies in which people with different backgrounds, capabilities and aspirations may co-evolve.

"As we become more and more interconnected and interdependent, human development is no longer a matter of the evolution of individual groups of people but rather a matter of the co-evolution of all people".[5]

6. Inspiration

6.1 *Keng*

The following description of a whole that has to be continuously created and recreated with respect to changing temporal and spatial conditions in such a way that its individual parts do not dominate but rather enhance one another, may serve as inspiration for the planning and maintenance of urban environments – and for the organization and functioning of the Institute.

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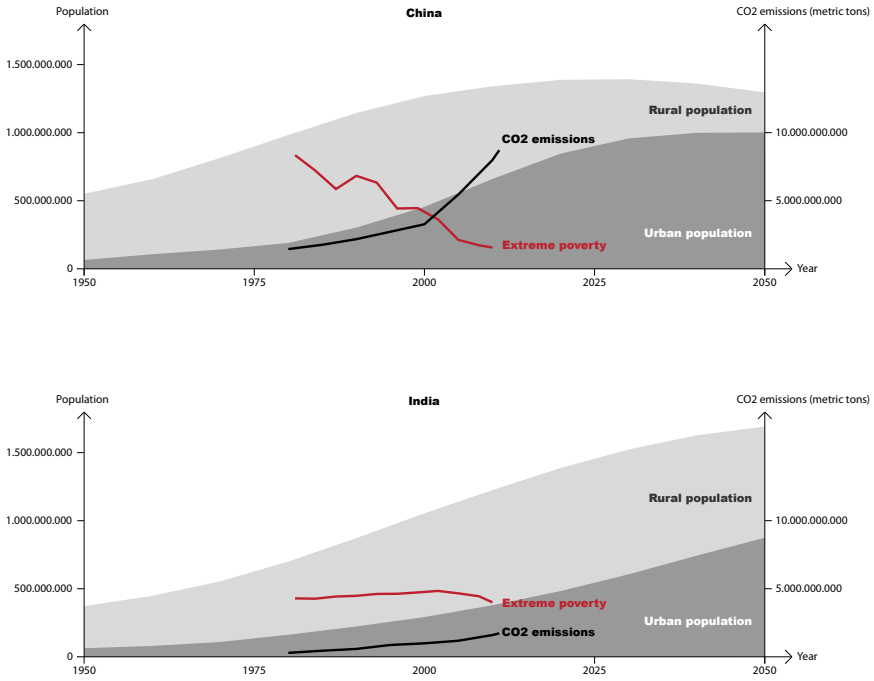
[4] Quoted from: *Understanding evolution*. Berkeley University: http://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/evo_33

[5] Quoted from: *India: the Urban Transition – a Case Study of Development Urbanism*; Henrik Valeur; 2014.

"*In the classical period, a common food staple throughout northern Asia was keng, a kind of a millet gruel in which various locally available and seasonal ingredients were brought into relationship with one another. The goal was for each ingredient – the cabbage, the radish, the bit of pork – to retain its own colour, texture and flavor, but at the same time to be enhanced by its relationship with the other ingredients*".[6]

6.2 China and India

The following comparison between China and India may serve to demonstrate a possible connection between urbanization, the reduction of extreme poverty and the stabilization of population growth, although it also indicates a possible connection to increased CO^2 emissions and by extension to greater environmental deterioration, thus implying that there are strong reasons for promoting urbanization, albeit a different kind of urbanization.



China: rapid urban growth and stabilization of overall population growth, rapid decrease in extreme poverty and rapid increase in CO2 emissions. India: slow urban growth and continued high overall population growth, slow decrease in extreme poverty and slow increase in CO2 emissions. From *India: the Urban Transition*, Henrik Valeur, 2014.

6.3 Vertical kitchen garden

The following project was conducted by the author in collaboration with Indian students, a local NGO and an international expert of permaculture for former slum-dwellers who had forcibly been moved from settlements located close to livelihood opportunities within the city to so-called rehabilitation colonies on the outskirts of the city. It may serve as an example of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural collaboration.

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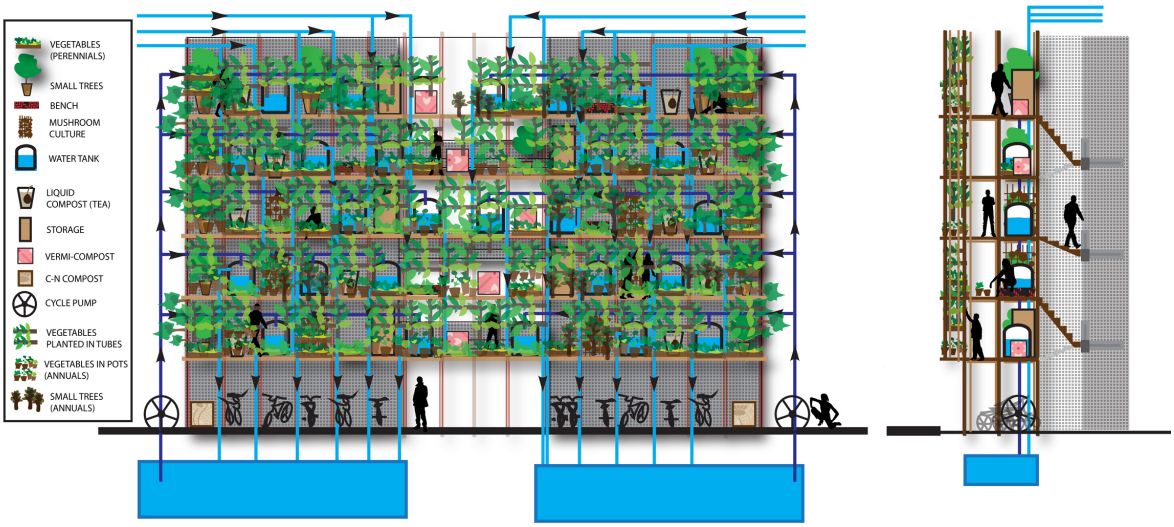
[6] Quoted from: *East Asian Philosophy*; Roger T. Ames; 1998.

Community kitchen gardens were proposed here, with an eye toward making the inhabitants less vulnerable to fluctuating food prices and insecure food supply and with an eye toward reducing the need for/dependency on government subsidies. In addition, community kitchen gardens would help recreate the social tissue, which was disrupted when people were resettled.

Due to lack of open land in these colonies, where population densities reach more than 100,000 people per km2, it was proposed to make vertical kitchen gardens. The triple-layered scaffoldinglike structure is made of *Balliyaan* (eucalyptus poles) and anchored to the blank end walls of a housing block consisting of 64 small flats.



Structural diagram. The inner layer holds 25 water tanks that get filled up with rainwater and 10 large buckets, in which water is being enriched with vermin-compost. The rainwater is harvested from the roofs of the existing buildings and led through pipes into the water tanks on the upper levels. When these tanks fill up, excess water runs into the tanks on the lower levels and from here, eventually, into underground tanks, where the water is stored. Citrus trees and vegetables, which demand relatively large amounts of soil, are grown in containers that are also placed in the inner layer. Mushrooms are grown in the darkest parts. Benches with storage space and sheds for storage are located on each level. The outer layer consists of a shelf system where herbs and perennial vegetables are grown in small containers, with small amounts of soil. Herbs are used for consumption, for medicinal purposes and for pest management. Between the inner and the outer layer are walkways, which are connected to the existing staircases. The whole structure is covered in a mesh that will keep plants and children from falling out. Grapes may be grown on parts of this mesh. Smaller sections of the structure may be covered in agricultural plastic in order to bring forth greenhouse effects. Carbon/nitrogen compost is produced in large containers on the ground level. This compost is used to enrich the soil.

7. Background

7.1 A great success or a huge failure

According to the United Nations, within the next thirty years, the world is going to be populated by around two billion more people, almost all of whom will inhabit cities in the Global South.[7]

Building cities for such a large number of people within such a short span of time poses an enormous challenge and simultaneously presents an enormous opportunity. Depending on how it is done, it could either become one of humanity's greatest successes or become one of our worst failures.

In many ways, population growth is problematic but it is better that it occurs in urban rather than in rural areas. One of the reasons for this is that we are better able to solve problems and make progress when we do it together, as we may do in cities. This is also why the evolution of cities and civilizations has always been closely intertwined. Two billion new urban inhabitants could give an incredible boost to the development of our civilization!

7.2 Challenges and potentials

While most individuals move to cities in search of opportunities and the prospect of a better life, if not for themselves then at least for their children, the potential common benefits of urbanization include cultural, economic and human development, scientific and technological progress. Even so, rather than solving existing social problems related to inequality, exclusion and oppression and rather than solving existing environmental problems related to pollution, resource depletion and destruction of ecosystems, current modes of urban development often serve to aggravate these problems.

Given the incredible scale and speed of urban development in many parts of the world, the impact of these problems can be felt globally. And though the origins of the problems can often be traced back to the Global North, i.e. being rooted in colonization and/or industrialization, the solutions have to be found in the rapidly growing cities of the Global South.

We may all may help find these solutions, not only because of the shared responsibility for many of the problems, but also because we all, in one way or the other, are affected by these problems.

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[7] The world's total population is expected to rise from 7.3 billion in 2015 to 9.3 billion in 2045, while the urban population of the "less developed regions" is expected to rise from 3 billion in 2015 to 4.9 billion in 2045. In the "more developed regions", the urban population is expected to increase by some 115 million people during the same period. Thus, the world's entire future population growth is going to be absorbed by cities and nearly 95 percent of the future urban growth will be taking place in the "less developed regions". Source: *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision, CD-ROM Edition*; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division: http://esa.un.org/unup/CD-ROM/Urban-Rural-Population.htm (accessed January 07, 2016).

The attempt to solve these problems may also lead to the creation of new knowledge, new networks and new markets from which we may all benefit. And it may lead to insight and inspiration that could be used to make urban lifestyles and urban environments in the Global North more sustainable too.

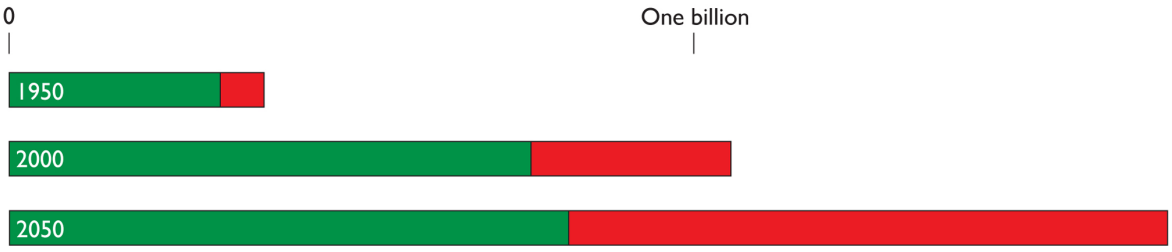
7.3 From the Green Revolution to Urban Co-evolution

The Green Revolution, initiated in the 1940's onwards in the Global South, introduced new methodologies and technologies in agricultural production, which helped increase food production to meet the demands of a growing population (and thus enabling the population to continue to grow).

However, by rendering obsolete previous methodologies and technologies, which had been developed over generations and in accordance with local conditions, the "revolution" often resulted in contamination and overexploitation of soil and water, in addition to decreased employment opportunities, which has caused millions of people to leave their villages in search of new livelihoods in cities.

Despite massive rural-to-urban migration, however, and the fact that this may help restrict population growth because urban dwellers in general have fewer children than their rural counterparts, development agencies have continued to focus on the development of rural areas while largely neglecting the development of cities.

Though rural and urban development is interrelated, and efficient agriculture is a precondition for urbanization, history proves that urban culture, not agriculture, is the real driver of human development. Why? Because cities are not only places of co-existence, they are also places of co-evolution.



Rural (green)/urban (red) population in India: 1950, 2000 and 2050. From *India: the Urban Transition*, Henrik Valeur, 2014

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CO-EVOLUTION traveling exhibition, Tongji University, Shanghai, 2006. Photo: UiD