

**An Urban Agenda for an Urban Age**  
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**Introduction**

I want to applaud Deutsche Bank and the London School of Economics—and particularly Wolfgang Nowak and Ricky Burdett—for the inspiration of the Urban Age. There is simply no parallel effort underway in the world today that takes cities as the organizing units for the new global order and declares boldly that we have much to learn from each other across nations, across continents, across cultures.

At the outset, I want to thank two of my Brookings colleagues, Andy Altman and Julie Wagner, who have coauthored the address that I will give today. We have been profoundly influenced by our fellow Urban Age travelers, who are pushing the boundaries of city thinking and inventing a new paradigm for urban policy and practice.

The proposition that has animated this initiative from the start is audacious and visionary. “The late 20th Century was the age of economic globalization. The first part of the 21st century will be the age of the city, the ‘Urban Age.’”[\[i\]](#)

The “Urban Age.” A simple, clear, unqualified phrase. An incontrovertible statement of fact. In 2007, the population living in the world’s cities—some 3.2 billion souls—will constitute a majority of the world’s population.[\[ii\]](#) Ipso facto, we live in an Urban Age.

Yet an “Urban Age” is more than just a description of what is; it is a vision of what can be, if we imagine it, will it, and deliver it.

We make the following proposition today:

First, the 21st Century will be the Urban Age, where an ever growing majority of the world’s population will live in cities. This Urban Age is happening at a dizzying pace and with a scale, diversity, complexity and level of connectivity that challenges traditional paradigms and renders many conventional tools and practices obsolete. This great urbanization explodes the very notion of “city,” given the vast physical expanses where a growing portion of people and businesses now congregate. The Urban Age positions these conurbations as the vehicles for addressing the major challenges facing the world today: extending economic prosperity, promoting environmental sustainability, and reducing poverty.

This leads to our second point: in the face of rapid, unrelenting, unsettling change, cities lack a coherent roadmap to realize the promise of the Urban Age.

Our visits to and inquiries about five global cities—New York, Shanghai, London, Mexico City and Johannesburg—have unveiled the stresses and strains that many cities face as they grapple with accelerated growth, demographic change, and economic restructuring. Although each of these cities has shown a remarkable ability to innovate and experiment, our primary conclusion is that there are broad disconnects between urban change on one hand and urban policy and practice on the other. These disconnects are magnified at the national and multinational level, where specialized and one dimensional policies dominate. As a result, the promise of cities is being systematically undermined.

Thus, we call for an Urban Agenda that matches the pace and intensity of the Urban Age. This Urban Agenda will embrace the goals of competitive, sustainable, and inclusive cities and, equally important, commit to pursuing and delivering these objectives in tandem. That will require wholesale change in how *people*—practitioners, policymakers, and researchers—do their business. It will necessitate *programs and policies* that drive integrative, multi-dimensional thinking and action. It will extol the role of the *physical*, emphasizing the importance of building cities that are adaptive and resilient and advance broader objectives. It will reinvent *urban politics* to advance the new urban paradigm. And it will require multinational corporations to be grounded in “place” and become strong *partners* for change.

Make no mistake, the stakes are high: the path of development in many cities around the world is simply not sustainable socially or environmentally or politically – nor, ultimately, economically.

**So let us start with our initial proposition: the 21st Century will be the Urban Age, where the majority of the world’s population will live in cities.**

Our world is undergoing a period of change and transformation that is unprecedented in ancient or modern times.

The world population grew by leaps and bounds in the 20th century – from 1.7 billion in 1900 to 2.5 billion in 1950 to 6.5 billion in 2000 – and is projected to expand by another 2.6 billion people in the next 50 years.[\[iii\]](#)

Globalization has opened and integrated markets and restructured the economies of both developed and developing countries.

The volume and value of global trade have increased exponentially in recent decades, rising 118 percent and 161 percent respectively since 1990 alone.[\[iv\]](#)

The industrial revolution in the developing world has rewired the circuitry of global markets almost overnight; China’s manufacturing exports alone have jumped from one percent to seven percent of the global total since 1980.[\[v\]](#)

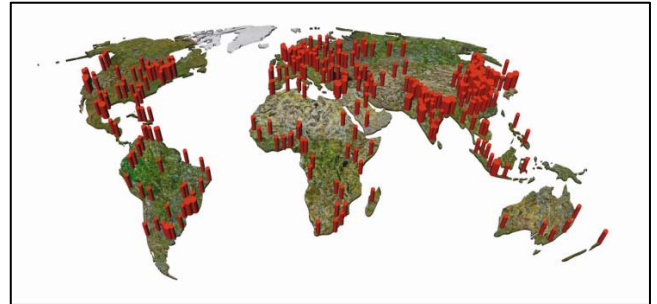
Over the past two decades, some two and a half billion people in China, India, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have discarded economic isolationism and entered a global labor market.[\[vi\]](#)

Technological innovation has shrunk the world, reducing the cost of transmitting information to virtually nothing. Internet users in developing countries could constitute more than half the world total within five years if current trends persist.[\[vii\]](#)

The metaphor, popularized by Tom Friedman, is that the world is now flat.

But population and economic activity are not uniformly distributed across the globe. Rather people have settled and the economy is organized in a discontinuous, nonlinear fashion.

The world, to borrow a phrase from Richard Florida, is “spiky” and each spike represents a city where the world’s economy and population is disproportionately concentrated.[\[viii\]](#)



Source: London School of Economics

Globalization and technological innovation, rather than flattening the world spatially, is physically rooting itself in dense spatial arrangements of people and firms, transportation and housing, ports and facilities.

The new world order is an urban order. The Urban Age has five central characteristics.

First, is *scale* and *size*. The world’s urban population today is over 3 billion people, the same size as the world’s total population in 1960.[\[ix\]](#) There are now 400 cities with populations of over one million people when a century ago there were only 16.[\[x\]](#)

In recent decades, we have grown a network of megacities; 23 cities with more than 10 million people now comprise 5 percent of the world’s population.[\[xi\]](#)

The population of Greater Mumbai is now larger than the total population of Norway and Sweden, combined; likewise, Greater Sao Paulo’s population is now roughly equal to the population of Australia.[\[xii\]](#) With even more growth projected in developing countries, the urban population of Africa will exceed the total population of Europe by 2030.[\[xiii\]](#)

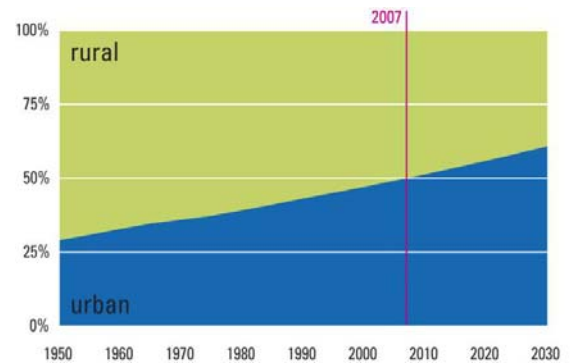


Source: The World Bank

As cities have grown in people, they have stretched outwards, consuming vast expanses of land and covering enormous distances. Over a seventy year period, the New York metropolis, for example, expanded over 1300 percent and now covers more than 4.6 million acres of land.[\[xiv\]](#)

Secondly, *speed* and *velocity* define the Urban Age.

In 1950, 29 percent of the world's population lived in cities. By 1990, the share had risen to 43 percent. Now, as stated before, it is slated to pass 50 percent by next year. And, by 2030, it will surpass 60 percent of the world's population.[\[xv\]](#)



Source: London School of Economics

Since 1950, the world's urban population has almost quadrupled in size.[\[xvi\]](#) Between 2005 and 2030, the world's urban population is expected to increase at an average annual rate of close to 2 percent, almost twice the growth rate of the world's population. If current trends persist, the world's urban population will surpass 5 billion people sometime around 2030.[\[xvii\]](#)

Third, urban growth is being fuelled by new levels of *mobility* and *migration of diverse* populations, within and across nations.

Hundreds of millions of rural residents in China, in Brazil, in India and elsewhere across the globe are moving in droves to cities. These rural-to-urban migrants are pulled by the tantalizing prospect of jobs and opportunity, driven by the harsh realities of rural life and, in Africa and elsewhere, displaced by horrific wars and civil conflicts.

Tens of millions of people are also on the move across national borders. Today, international migrants comprise 3 percent of the world's population[\[xviii\]](#) and are settling in a growing number of countries. Between 1960 and 2005, the number of countries hosting more than 500,000 migrants more than doubled, from 30 to 64.[\[ixx\]](#)



Source: The World Bank

Immigration has fuelled urbanization in developed countries. In the United States, for example, cities grew during the 1990s almost exclusively because of the influx of Hispanic and Asian populations. In Berlin, over 13 percent of your population are immigrants.[\[xx\]](#)

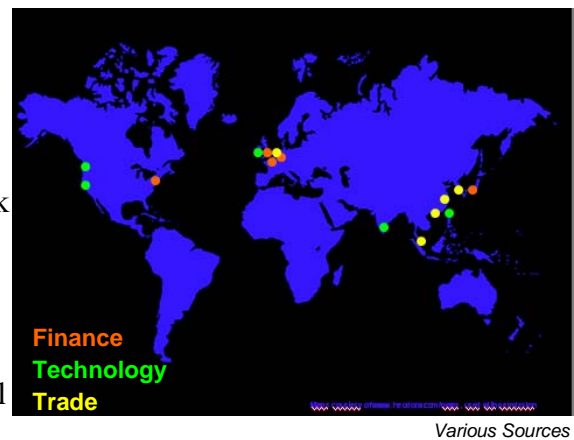
Fourth, urban expansion has created new conurbations of staggering *complexity*. In one respect, cities are playing their traditional roles as the great levellers of people from radically disparate walks of life—of foreign born and native born, of rural migrants and urban residents, of rich and poor, of traditional and modern cultures.

In the 21st century, cities also represent an uneasy coexistence between the global and the local—of high rise office towers and dilapidated slums; of the formal and informal economy, of educated elites and impoverished residents; of global chains and indigenous firms. The divisions between these phenomena are not stark; there are often symbiotic and synergistic relationships between aspects of urban life, say the formal and informal economy, which are multilayered and evolving.

Finally, the Urban Age is characterized by an unprecedented level of *connectivity*, between and among people, firms and places.

Trans-national migration binds together countries of origin and immigrant-rich cities, as people, money and ideas flow back and forth. In 2004, immigrants around the globe sent \$226 billion in remittances back to their home countries, an astonishing 1 percent of global GDP.[\[xxi\]](#)

Across nations, tight linkages are being forged between cities with similar industry clusters: financial centres like London and Tokyo; technology centres like San Jose and Bangalore; or trading centres like Rotterdam and Singapore.

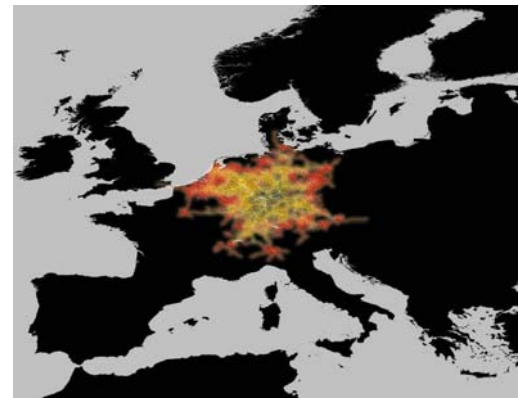




Even within nations, countries like Germany are taking this reality of urban connectivity to its logical conclusion and creating a network of inter-linked cities, connected, and soon to be even more connected, by modern rail and technology.

These five qualities of urbanization—scale, speed, diversity, complexity and connectivity—place cities at the center of the global economy, global challenges ... and, ultimately, global solutions.

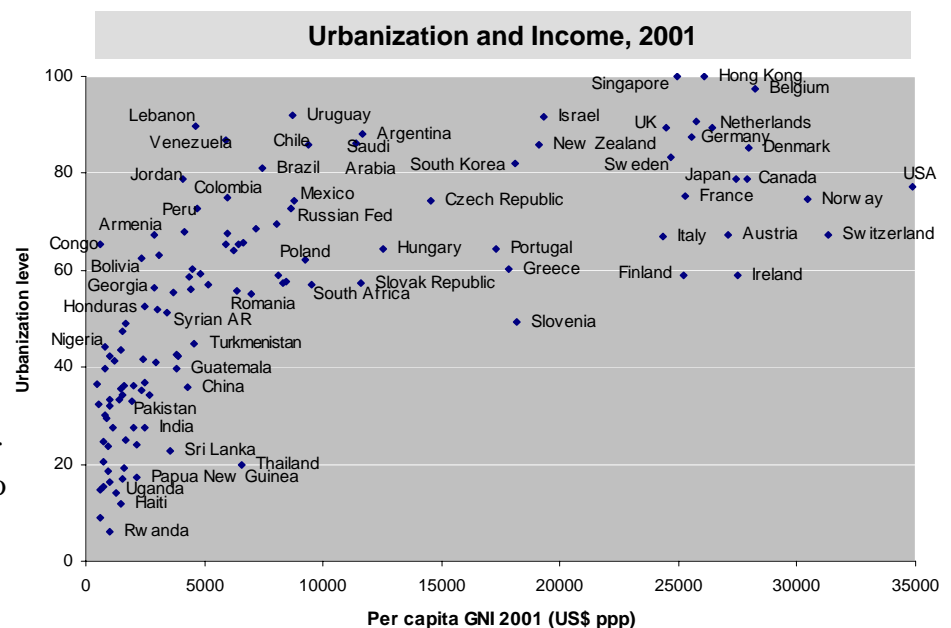
High Speed Train Accessibility from Frankfurt



Source: Venice Biennale, 2006

Can the world extend the promise of economic prosperity and integrated markets and productive labor? Today, the path to prosperity runs directly through cities. As UN-Habitat has bluntly stated:

“Cities make countries rich. Countries that are highly urbanized have higher incomes, more stable economies, stronger institutions and are better able to withstand the volatility of the global economy than those with less urbanized populations.”[\[xxii\]](#)



Per capita GNI 2001 (US\$ ppp)

Source: International Institute for Environment and Development

Can the world address the environmental crisis of global warming and climate change? Rapid urbanization has, no doubt, exacerbated environmental pressures. Yet cities offer the best promise of developing in ways that are environmentally sound and energy efficient; objectives that, as a major report to the British government just concluded are prerequisites to global prosperity.[\[xxiii\]](#)



Source: The World Bank

Can the world win the global fight against poverty? Incredibly, 998 million people now live in disease-spreading slums characterized by inadequate housing, unsafe drinking water and open sewer and sanitation systems.[\[xxiv\]](#) Yet, cities offer the promise of ultimately connecting hundreds of millions of workers to the expanding job opportunities offered by the global economy.



Source: The World Bank

Economic Prosperity. Environmental Sustainability. Social Inclusivity.

In an Urban Age, the battles to achieve the highest aspirations of the 21st century and beyond will be fought – and won or lost -- in our cities.

## PROSPERITY SUSTAINABILITY INCLUSIVITY



Source: The World Bank

**Let us now move from the general to the specific, from aggregate global statistics to the experiences of individual cities.**

Here we find that, in the face of rapid, change, cities lacks a coherent roadmap to realize the promise of the Urban Age.

As Ricky described, the Urban Age Initiative selected five cities—New York, Shanghai, London, Mexico City and Johannesburg—to discern how cities of a certain class and type are adapting to global forces.

These five cities, although vastly different in many respects, are all members of an exclusive club, global cities.

These cities, drawing on Saskia Sassen’s seminal research, are “major sites for the accumulation of capital, command points in the world economy, headquarters for corporations, and important hubs of global transportation and communication ...”[\[xxv\]](#)

These cities have created “cities within cities” to house the new global elite—Canary Wharf in London, Lower and Central Manhattan in New York, Pudong in Shanghai, Sandtown in Johannesburg, Santa Fe in Mexico City.

Each of these cities offers policy lessons for other global cities experiencing comparable growth pressures... and, astonishingly, even for cities that are not.



Source: The Urban Age

Let us start our tour with **Shanghai**.

Shanghai poses the central dilemma of speed: can a city truly be competitive if hyper-growth is degrading its environment and excluding millions of people from prosperity?



Source: The Alfred Herrhausen Society

What took New York and London 200 years to establish, Shanghai has accomplished in 10. Transforming single homes into skyscrapers and bike paths into byways, Shanghai gives new meaning to the word hyper-growth. And, hyper-growth in Shanghai means hyper-density. From 300 skyscrapers in 1996 to over 3000 in 2006, the city's skyline has become a symbol of modernity and progress.[\[xxvi\]](#)



Source: The London School of Economics

Yet Shanghai's intensity to grow "up" has been matched only by its choreography to grow "out". New satellite cities, as well as new districts and the re-imagined waterfronts, will be tied together by a web of roads, elevated freeways and a 21st Century subway system.

The re-making of Shanghai also includes its swift evolution up the economic value chain. Their bold advancements include moving beyond the manufacturing of textiles and toys into the production of advanced products, such as micro-electronics and automobiles. Over the next 10 years, Shanghai aspires to move from a city of processing into a city of innovation and to quadruple its GDP.



Source: The City of Shanghai

This velocity in 'all things Shanghai' has been largely propelled by the pro-urban policies of its national government. In many respects, Shanghai's growth—the iconic image of the Pudong skyline, the rapid expansion of modern infrastructure, the grand plans for the 2010 Expo—is a direct message from China's leaders to the world: "we have arrived."

The National Open Policy Law has fuelled "a tidal wave of [four million] migrant workers" into Shanghai.[\[xxvii\]](#) This so-called "floating population" constitutes a "state organized informality" that underlies the enormous push now underway in the city.[\[xxviii\]](#)



Source: The Urban Age



Shanghai's enormous progress comes with a series of costs and consequences felt today...and even more so in the long-term: the city is growing in ways that are simply socially and environmentally unsustainable.

Migrant workers have no access to the formal education system, have virtually no rights and commonly live in substandard housing.

And while Shanghai has made substantial investments in a state-of-the art transit system, the city is principally embracing the 20th century addiction to cars ... and intensified road congestion and the elevated CO2 emissions that come as a result.



Source: *The Urban Age*



Source: *The Alfred Herrhausen Society*

We also traveled to **Mexico City**.

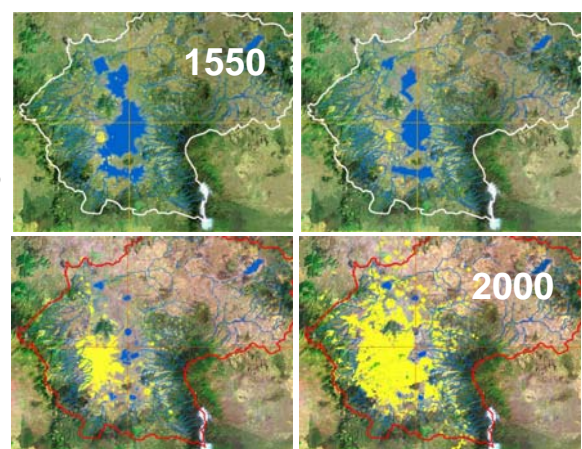
Mexico City presented us with the challenge of scale: can a sprawling, fragmented regional city reverse course and embrace sustainability?

Since 1940, Mexico City has expanded 10-fold and is now the second largest metropolitan region in the world with a population of 19.5 million people.[\[xxix\]](#) The city's growth did not come in the form of high density development vertically... but by continuous, uninterrupted growth horizontally. Over 10 million people live on the periphery of the vast city...in illegal and informal housing.[\[xxx\]](#)

As a consequence, Mexico City is losing a precious resource, water. For over the past 500 years, Mexico City has been in the midst of a precarious struggle between development and the protection of its lakes. Here is what has happened to their lakes (in blue) in response to their growth (in yellow). Their basin is virtually drying up as water is extracted from the basin twice as fast as it is replenished.[\[xxxi\]](#)



Source: *The Urban Age*



Source: *FDU*

And, at the same time, rivers that cross the city are turning into open sewage canals. As a result, an increasing number of residents outside the city center suffer from inadequate, if not non-existent, water. Recognizing this crisis, lake reclamation projects are underway to restore this precious resource.



Source: Jose Castillo/arquitectura 911sc

The real solution in Mexico City is to contain and direct growth. Yet, as population has decentralized, governance has fractured and fragmented. There are over 79 executive bodies, 3 levels of government, 63 legislative zones and over 80 territorial plans that have limited relationship to one another.[\[xxxii\]](#)

Thus, efforts to contain and direct growth have floundered on the banks of balkanized government. The Banda Dos policy, enacted by the Federal District, emphasizes the re-densification of the city's historical center.[\[xxxiii\]](#) New investments in electricity, water, and sewer have helped add new life to corridors such as you see here on the left. And, allowing higher density development has encouraged building construction.



Source: Jose Castillo/arquitectura 911sc

Banda Dos has succeeded in reversing a loss of population in the core. Yet rising land values and the fact that the Banda Dos policy only covers a fraction of the vast regional city has limited the effectiveness of an otherwise productive policy. Growth is leapfrogging out.



Source: Jose Castillo/arquitectura 911sc

Complicating matters, Santa Fe, the locus of the global corporations, is physically isolated from the core city. Instead, this global enclave is surrounded by either gated communities or by slums that meander over the adjacent hills.

In the end, Mexico City's efforts to reverse course will require radical surgery in the form and reach of government.



Source: Jose Castillo/arquitectura 911sc

Let us continue on to **London**.

London offers us a cautionary tale: Can a world class city grow along sustainable lines with an under-funded, under-extended and under-maintained public transport system?

Once a slow growing city, London is once again booming. Twenty years after the “Big Bang” of financial deregulation, London has emerged as the global centre of finance and capital.

Like many global cities, immigrants are fuelling population growth. In fact, 95% of new London inhabitants over the last 10 years were born outside of the U.K.[xxxiv] London anticipates adding almost another 1 million people over the next 10 years.[xxxv]

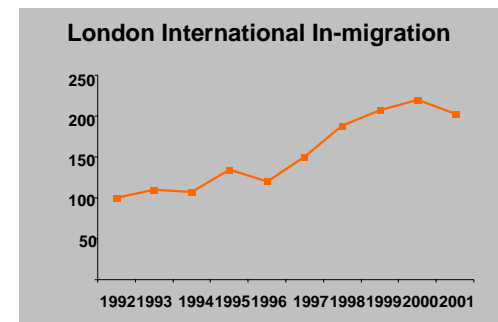
In a small country, reinvestment has become the hallmark of government policies. The green belt surrounding London has managed to contain growth inward, placing intense pressure on the city’s real estate market.

Over the last eight years alone, London experienced a 120 percent increase in housing prices while overall income growth was 25 percent during the same period.[xxxvi]

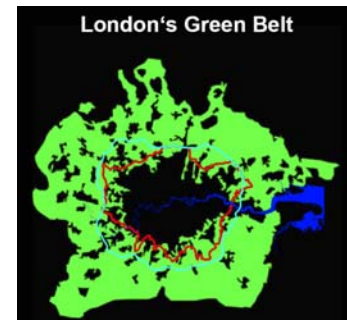
To compensate, other policies have sought to maintain and extend affordable housing, and avoid its concentration. National government has significantly expanded resources for housing production. In addition, planning policies require 50 percent of all new housing to be affordable to people who would be otherwise priced out of the city.[xxxvii] In the midst of economic pressures, London is also demonstrating a resiliency in their housing. Smaller, discrete spaces—garages, bathhouses—have been transformed into housing.[xxxviii]



Source: The Urban Age



Source: The Urban Age



Source: The Urban Age



Source: Anne Power, London School of Economics

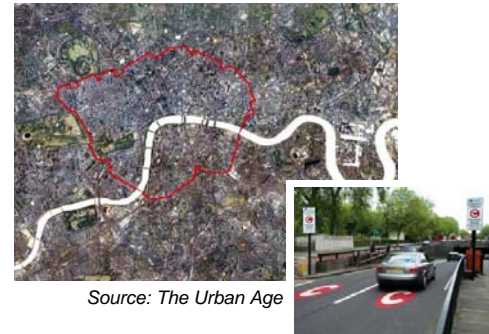


To accommodate new growth, the city is anticipating enormous residential expansion east along the Thames Gateway. This will require the cleanup and retrofitting of vast industrial areas, which used to be the heart of the great shipping empire. Among other large projects, the 2012 Olympics will be in East London, with long-term plans for substantial new housing investments.



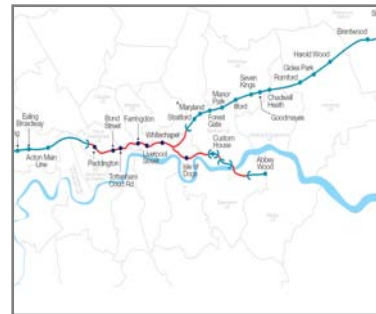
Source: *The Urban Age*

If London has an Achilles heel, it is transportation. True, its well publicized congestion pricing has reduced traffic in the city centre by about 20 percent.[\[xxxix\]](#) And there are other successes to be proud of: increased bus ridership, the extension of light rail, even the rise of bicycling.



Source: *The Urban Age*

However, transit access to the Thames Gateway to support anticipated development is a huge question mark. Thus, the city's smart reinvestment strategy could become an exit ramp reality. Londoners will be forced to use their cars to reach what would otherwise be easily reachable destinations.



Source: London Transport, Cross Rail

As with most things in Britain, power remains too centralized in national government. London, perhaps the premier global city, lacks sufficient fiscal authority to finance a transit system equal to the challenge.

## Let us now explore Johannesburg.

This city raises a central question: how can a city grow inclusively when its physical and economic environments remain sharply exclusive and when crime prevents the very evolution of civility?

In Johannesburg, the legacy of apartheid has effectively created two, primarily separate, economies. The first is the highly formalized economy, which includes the elite financial services sector. Once clustered in Johannesburg's downtown, these sectors have suburbanized, and are accessible almost exclusively by car.

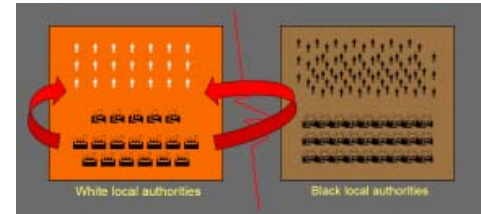


Source: *The Urban Age*



The second is the immense informal economy, which includes the selling and bartering of local products and produce.[\[xi\]](#)

To overcome these disparities, South Africa constructed one of the most progressive national constitutions. The number of local authorities was reduced from 1100 in 1994 to 283 today, a move that joined black and white residents under unified municipalities and ensured a fairer allocation of tax resources.[\[xli\]](#)



Source: *The Urban Age*

The Bill of Rights, in addition, proclaims that “Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing.”[\[xlii\]](#) More recently, the Minister of Housing gave an explicit deadline of replacing all informal settlements in the country by 2014.[\[xliii\]](#)



Source: *The Alfred Herrhausen Society*

In carrying out this formidable directive, the primary focus has been on *how* to deliver quality, electrified housing to replace hundreds of thousands of make shift homes.



Source: *The Alfred Herrhausen Society*

Less focus has been placed on *where* to build this housing. Instead, South Africa’s legal framework guides the siting of development, which continues to support social exclusion. Under the current laws, “a poor person living next to a rich person is a court case,” explained one of our South African colleagues.[\[xliv\]](#)



Source: *The Alfred Herrhausen Society*

As a consequence, new homes remain contained to Johannesburg’s historically black areas or are pushed out to the city’s edge. In either case, the majority of blacks remain separated: separated from the growing economic centers of Sandtown and Rosebank as well as from the middle to upper class residents of the city.



Source: *The Alfred Herrhausen Society*

Johannesburg’s extreme crime rate is exacerbating patterns of segregation, and driving gated, fortified communities. “This is a form of settlement that has given up on civility,” explained our Urban Age colleague Richard Sennett.[\[xlv\]](#) For these residents of Johannesburg, life takes place in a car, in a mall or in the controlled space of home, church, or clubhouse.



Source: *The Urban Age*

Even with the apartheid legacy behind them and progressive fiscal policies before them, Johannesburg continues to eerily grow in ways that are isolating or exclusive.

Let us finally move to **New York**.

New York presents a unique situation: can a global city “go it alone” and resolve the inevitable negative implications of globalization virtually by itself, absent national government support?

Nearly bankrupt in the 1970s, plagued by crime and racial unrest in the 1980s, New York City staged a remarkable recovery in the 1990s. The recovery was led by two disparate forces: globalization, which revalued New York’s traditional role as America’s finance, media and fashion centers, and the precipitous decline in crime, which reestablished New York as a tourist and talent magnet. As in London, this recovery has survived the 2001 terrorist assault on the World Trade Center, illustrating again the resilience of cities.

Population both in New York City and the region has been growing steadily, like London fuelled in large part by immigrants. While growth is felt across the region, it is creating a squeezing, price spiking effect felt most intensively in the city. “We are a city built to its edges” remarked one City official.[\[xlv\]](#)

New York now has a smaller share of middle income neighborhoods than any other major metropolis in the U.S. Incredibly, 51 percent of neighborhoods are identified as high-income, 40 percent as low-income and only 8 percent as middle income.[\[xlvii\]](#) Consequently, New York is home to some of the world’s wealthiest neighborhoods but also some of the nation’s poorest.

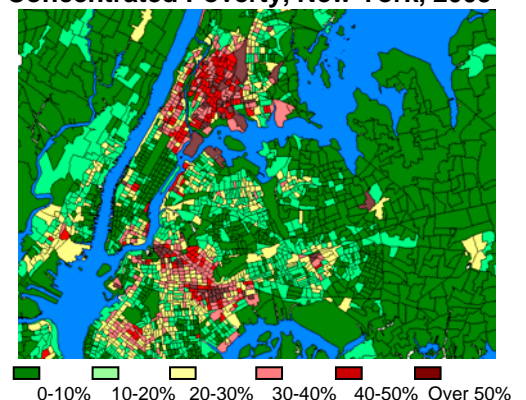


Source: *The Urban Age*



Source: Gunther Intelmann

#### Concentrated Poverty, New York, 2005



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

In response, New York is using local powers and local resources to increase the supply of affordable housing. The city is creatively using zoning and regulatory powers to re-use vacant industrial sites in its old port areas to accommodate new development.

With the federal government reducing support for affordable housing, the city is also subsidizing the largest municipal affordable housing plan in the nation's history. Over the next seven years, the city plans to commit billions of dollars to build and preserve 165,000 units of affordable housing.<sup>[xlviii]</sup>

Yet, across the city, large and small real estate transactions are—unit by unit—transforming affordable housing into high-end, luxury housing. The most visible, recent transaction was the sale of Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village, developments that are home to tens of thousands of primarily middle-class renters. With the sale, these homes are in danger of being converted to luxury condos. “If we continue along this path,” shared one New York colleague, “neighborhoods that even today are racially and economically integrated will not be in the next 10 years.”<sup>[xlix]</sup>

### What do these city tours tell us?

On the positive side, we have seen a set of proud, powerful cities grappling with urban change that is unprecedented in human history.

These five cities are extending the envelope of urban policy and practice. From congestion pricing in London, to governance reform in Johannesburg, to affordable housing production in New York to transit extensions in Shanghai to re-urbanization in Mexico City, these cities are innovating and experimenting in the face of monumental challenges.

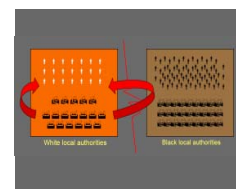
Yet, despite some measurable signs of progress on numerous fronts, our overriding conclusion is that the consequences of rapid population growth, demographic change and economic restructuring are overwhelming the corrective, channeling powers of policy and practice.



Source: *The Urban Age*



Source: [www.gothamist.com](http://www.gothamist.com), 2006



Source: *The Urban Age*



## Why is this happening?

As I shared early in this presentation, times have changed. Not only is our world increasingly urban, this urbanity is increasing at a scale...at a speed...fuelled by mobility and diversity...arranged in a complexity... and tied together with a level of connectivity...never before seen or experienced.

The *scale* of urbanization, with its new vast geography of commuter sheds and supplier networks and labor and housing markets, is outstripping the structure and the administrative geography of city government. The administrative boundaries of Mexico City and New York are simply misaligned, undermining the ability to integrate key policies like transportation and housing and land use.

The *speed* of urbanization is confounding efforts to maintain the special qualities of cities. Architecture becomes same-ness instead of fine 'grain-ness'; economic speculation outstrips true demand; bold visions are quickly rendered obsolete by rapid change; and processes to engage and empower people in local decisions, eroded. Shanghai, for example, appears hell-bent on repeating the worst excesses of Western style urban renewal, destroying whole portions of the old city overnight to make way for the new.

The rapid *migration* of diverse populations to cities is challenging both economic integration and social cohesion. In London, the ranks of foreign born residents are not just the global elite, such as you see here, but also very poor residents who are fighting to live amongst London's astronomically high real estate prices.

The *complexity* of urbanization mocks the dominant conventions of urban policy: one dimensional, compartmentalized, driven by specialized professions, often incoherent and even contradictory. In Johannesburg, the failure to reconcile housing, transport, land use and security policy is creating a landscape still defined by segregation and sprawl.

### Scale



### Speed



### Migration



### Complexity



Source: *The Urban Age*, World Bank



The general observation is this: there is a sharp disconnect between the challenges of the Urban Age and our current set of urban solutions.

There is a disconnect between policies intended to promote economic growth, policies designed to advance environmental sustainability and policies aimed at reducing poverty.

There is a disconnect between the complexity of challenges and the narrow responses that dominate urban policy.

And there is a disconnect between the artificial geography of government, and the real footprint of the economy and environment.

In the 21st century, markets are moving quickly to reshape and remake urban places. Yet urban policy and urban governance appears stuck somewhere in the 20th century. The lag between transformational change and governmental action is immense.

**So, where do we go from here? How do we design and implement an Urban Agenda that matches the pace and intensity of the Urban Age?**

The goals of the Urban Agenda—competitive cities, sustainable cities, inclusive cities—are not at issue. The trinity of economy, environment and equity is substantively warranted, morally imperative and widely accepted.

Each of the cities we visited, whether they acknowledge it or not, are pursuing these three objectives, to a greater or lesser degree.

Yet, as we have seen, they are often doing all these things mechanistically, at the wrong scale, in hermetically sealed policies labeled “transportation” or “education” or “housing” or “economic development” or even “environmental protection.”



Cities are complex and interdependent. As such, they require multi-dimensional, integrated and holistic interventions.

This century’s Urban Agenda needs to be about delivery as much as aspiration.

#### PROSPERITY SUSTAINABILITY INCLUSIVITY



Source: The World Bank

Transportation	
Education	
Housing	
Economic Development	
Environmental Protection	

Various Sources

It is an agenda that must empower *people*, with more integrated and transformative *programs* and *policies*, through a heightened awareness of the *physical “place”*, with a realignment of *politics*, and an infusion of new *partners*.

We first need to focus on the *people* who deliver the Urban Agenda. Imagine networks of city builders who cut across disciplines, programs, practices, and professions. These city builders will perfect new ways of “reading” cities, and deploy new metrics and measures to diagnose city assets and ailments and gauge city progress. They will be fluent in multiple city “languages”—architecture, demographics, engineering, economics, and sociology—and be cognizant of theory and practice. Modern society has deified specialists and technicians who diagnose and strive to fix discrete problems, say traffic congestion or slum housing. If cities are to succeed, we must build a generation of generalists who see the connections between challenges and work to devise and implement policies that advance multiple objectives simultaneously. Our academies and universities must become central agents in furthering this ambition, breaking down artificial divisions between separate schools, professions curricula, departments, and self defeating academic fiefdoms. And we must find institutional vehicles that can deliver continuous, multi-disciplinary learning—so that professional evolution can respond to new challenges and changing demands.

We should strive to create city builders like Richard Baron, the premiere affordable housing developer in the U.S., who is here with us today. Richard is using the production of mixed income housing in America’s poorest neighborhoods as a catalyst for modernizing and improving neighborhood schools. The result is not just quality, distinctive housing but, more importantly, a neighborhood school that works, and is showing sharp improvements in student performance. In Richard’s mind, a “housing developer” cannot just build shelter to be successful; he or she must engage on those things, like education and skills training and transportation, which directly lift people out of poverty.



Source: McCormack Baron

To create more Richard Barons, we need to arm city builders with *programs* and *policies* that champion integration and holistic thinking. If housing is going to be a platform for opportunity, then housing policies need to connect to education, child care, transportation and policies. If transportation is going to promote mobility and advance sustainability, then transportation policies need to expand choices and embrace dense, transit-rich corridors of mixed residential, retail and employment uses. If employment growth is going to benefit low-income workers, than economic development policies need to include workforce development as a central feature.

Making linkages and connections between policies must be the norm not the exception, reinforced by incentives and new structures and systems. We must, borrowing from the law enforcement's adoption of "community policing," focus on the "co-production of solutions" across disciplines and professions. The vertical, silo driven bureaucracies of the past century need to be laid horizontal. In many respects, closing the divide between related but separately administered policies is as important as bridging the partisan and ideological divides that characterize so many countries and undermine urban success.

In all we do, we need to extol the role of *place* and the *physical*. As Ricky Burdett has eloquently reminded us, linking the physical to the human and the social, is a vehicle to achieve broader city goals. Centuries of city building have shown the value of an urban form that is resilient, adaptive to changing demands, conducive to retrofitting and recycling. How we grow physically, in essence affects whether we grow economically, sustainably and inclusively.

We in the United States have learned this the hard way. In the past sixty years, we literally destroyed cities in our effort to supposedly save them. We constructed over 5,000 miles of urban roads and elevated highways—slicing apart our waterfronts, our downtowns, our neighborhoods and parks—in the name of mobility, productivity and profits. We razed blocks and even entire neighborhoods to make way for vertical high rises of publicly subsidized housing.



Source: The City of Lancaster

We see today that what makes cities vital in the 21st century are those very attributes of urbanism—what Saskia Sassen calls "cityness"[\[1\]](#)—that we destroyed in the 20th century. Complexity. Density. Diversity of people and cultures. The convergence of the physical environment at multiple scales. The messy intersection of activities. A variance of distinctive designs. The layering of the old and the new. These are the physical elements that advance competitive, sustainable and inclusive cities.



Source: The City of St. Louis

The right physical interventions can truly have a seismic, transformative impact on markets, the environment and human potential. This can happen at multiple levels, from the micro to the macro, from the retrofitting of small, older properties to meet new residential demands to large scale interventions that have the power realign the physical landscape of cities in ways that advance the opportunities of a new century: Johannesburg 2010, the World Cup; Shanghai 2010, the World Expo; London 2012, the Olympics.



2010 World Cup



2010 World Expo



2012 Olympics

As we extend out the notion of transformative interventions, we need to find new language and methodologies to capture the complex reality of cities. The 20th century notion of measuring density, for example, fails to reflect the multiple economic, residential and social activities that are simultaneously underway in all parts of the city. Cities are not black and white, but shades of grey, increasingly blurring the line between the working world and the living world, informal and formal activities.

The deficit of language is even more apparent as we strive to understand cities in the developing world. Participants in the Shanghai, Mexico City and Johannesburg forums all argued forcefully that an Asian, Latin American and African urbanism is emerging that is distinct from the experiences of Europe and the United States. One participant in the Shanghai forum argued, for example, that in China “we do not need “public space” as such because Chinese people do not need a space to be designated as [public] to be able to do public things.”<sup>[11]</sup> With transnational discourse on global cities only to increase, it will require a heightened awareness of how cultural distinctions manifest differently in the physical, social and economic landscape.

To achieve policy reforms, we need to reinvent the *politics* of urban, by which we mean the extent to which national and multinational leaders feel any pressure to meaningfully understand and respond to cities.

In the end, cities are just cities. They act within the context of constitutional and statutory law, set by higher levels of government. A city focuses on its immigrants but cannot control immigration laws. A city focuses on reducing income disparities, but does not have the tools to close the gap between wages and prices. A city focuses on environmental sustainability, but generally lacks the power to catalyze market change through regulatory interventions.



Source: The World Bank

Yet cities do not just need smart national policies to succeed. The opposite is also true. National prosperity is now completely dependent on the ability of cities to reach their full potential.

So nations need to respect cities, revalue them and put “urban” realities at the heart of national decisions. For some countries like the United Kingdom, that will entail “letting go” of national power and giving cities more flexibility to adapt to demographic and economic change. For other countries like the United States, that will require the national government to take more responsibility on issues -- wages and incomes – that cities have little control over.





All nations (or states or provinces) must right size the administrative geography of local and metropolitan government -- or otherwise empower accountable entities with regional remits and powers -- so that challenges that cross borders can be addressed cleanly and clearly. All nations must make integration easy and compartmentalization hard. And all nations, particularly the United States, must do what it takes – through new tools, incentives and regulations, ambitious goals and objectives – to help cities grow in ways that address global warming and climate change.

Nations, in short, need an Urban Agenda themselves, given the economy-, environment- and people-shaping power of cities. The evolution of British urban policy over the past decade is one model to assess, as ultimately is Chancellor Merkel's more explicit commitment to an integrated, environmentally sensitive urban agenda.

In a global world, of course, nation states are no longer the final arbiter of city futures. Supra national institutions ranging from the UN to the World Bank have enormous impact on cities and the people who live there, for better or for worse.

These institutions, and many others, have principally viewed poverty as a rural phenomenon, to be tackled and overcome with targeted initiatives. The international community, therefore, has lacked a cohesive framework for thinking about and acting in cities. For the most part, these institutions relegate cities to the sidelines of decision making or ineffectual sub-bureaucracies, treating them as just one more supplicant for aid or constituency to be mollified.

The lack of spatial focus in these institutions, the lack of integrative thinking and action, must end.

As the Clinton Global Initiative on climate change recognizes, cities are the vehicles to combat global warming.

And as the Millennium Development Goals should recognize, cities must be the vehicles to eradicate a planet of slums.

Cities must move to the forefront of national and supranational agendas and priorities. This will require a quantum leap in international commitments to urban infrastructure and development. It will require a holistic, integrated approach to the deployment of these resources, for all the reasons we have already stated. And it will require a palpable lift in leadership. An annual World Summit on Cities with presidents and prime ministers and the heads of major corporations and philanthropies? The time is long past due.



Source: United Nations

One final avenue for action. The Urban Age cannot be delivered by government alone; it requires new *partners* in the private sector.

Cities do not just make nations rich. They make corporations rich. And, it is in the self interest, the shareholder interest of corporations to advance a full vision of prosperity of cities.

Thus, transnational corporations, the glue of global cities, have significant roles to play: becoming champions for market principles like transparency, accountability, innovation, and empiricism; devising new ways of amassing and deploying private capital to accelerate the building of housing and infrastructure; and collaborating together to extend the sharing of practices and innovations across cities and nations.



In the United States, for example, a consortium of financial institutions and philanthropies called Living Cities has pooled their capital to advance the production of affordable housing. Over the past ten years, they have invested close to \$400 million and stimulated the production of community assets that total over \$14 billion in value, a remarkable leverage of 38 to 1.[\[iii\]](#)



Why not take this model of pooled capital, apply it internationally and support a network of city intermediaries that can rapidly disseminate urban innovations and practices across the globe? The model is there and tested; technology enables virtual learning of the highest order; innovation is present throughout. This is an opportunity for major corporations to seize.



Source: Living Cities

## Conclusion

Let us end where we began.

Let us applaud Deutsche Bank for their venture into the world of the urban.

In the end, an “Urban Age” is a clarion call, a wake up message.

If cities are the organizing units of the new global order, then a broad range of policies and practices at the city, national and supra-national levels need to be overhauled, re-ordered, and integrated around new spatial realities and paradigms.

This Urban Age initiative telegraphs where we as city builders need to go.

We need to break down the barriers between specialized and self-referential disciplines, professions, and bureaucracies.

We need to link learnings and share innovations across networks of urban researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, across the developing and developed worlds.

We need to build cities that are prosperous, sustainable and inclusive.

The Urban Age has meaning and import far beyond those few of us who observe cities or build cities or govern cities.

This is truly a call to this generation to build a different world of urban opportunity and possibility.

An Urban Age requires that we act, with vision, imagination, and confidence. Will we seize the possibilities before us?



*Source: Urban Age*

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