

Build the Future

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Key Words

social, economical, technological, innovations, creativity, global, local, agriculture, sustainability, entrepreneurship, urbanisation, smart, cities

Urban Future

The vision of better live drives hundreds of thousands and put them into the move. From villages to the cities, or across continents, it is obvious that settling of Earth enters its final act. For the first time in history, urban population outrun rural population (World Bank 2015). No wonder that cities are growing faster than ever before. And it is because they have the ability to offer something for everyone, but only when they are created by everyone (Jacobs 1961). Cities, as Townsend describes them, accelerate time by compressing space, and let us do more with less of both (Townsend 2014:1). And this ability was even multiplied with beginning of an information era. New technologies made them more valuable and effective. Smart City thus became a basic unite of today's urbanization. But it would be wrong to perceive Smart City as a plain product of technical innovations. New markets are rising and new types of behaviour are emerging hand in hand with technological advances. This intersection of three is omnipresent in every contemporary human settlement and as such, it has the biggest impact on today's urbanization. It makes us to re-think the opportunities and challenges of how to build our cities in a smarter and sustainable way.



Self-provision of essential resources (Nyeri, Kenya)

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Innovations in the Private Space

New technological innovations, mainly then communication, have strengthened and centralized system of power and control. Therefore corporate actors and industries play a significant role in creation of Smart City. But today looking smart became even more valuable than actually being smart in order to be competitive on global markets. Moreover, monopolies tend to use notions of creativity and innovations, and thus exploit new resources, such as expandable labour force, and foster the economic growth. But as modernism before, its vision of clean operation and efficiency works as “amplifier of violence by worsening gaps between haves and have-not” (Townsend 2014:12).

New global restructuring process was most significant in the developing countries, where it caused economic integration on one hand, yet social exclusion and sudden informalisation on the other hand. Privatization has sold out or reformed public sector (Bayat 2000), and was further underpinned by development of highly affluent groups. These groups often substitute public sector in fields such as health care, housing or regulation of prices, and access to the predominantly public services in general. Therefore the struggle for public realm today is mostly caused by pitting the public against the private (Low, Smith 2016). Such a process has an impact on socio-economic transformation of its inhabitants. Therefore activities such as casual work, street hawking or slum dwelling have spread also among young and educated people with higher status, aspirations and social skills.

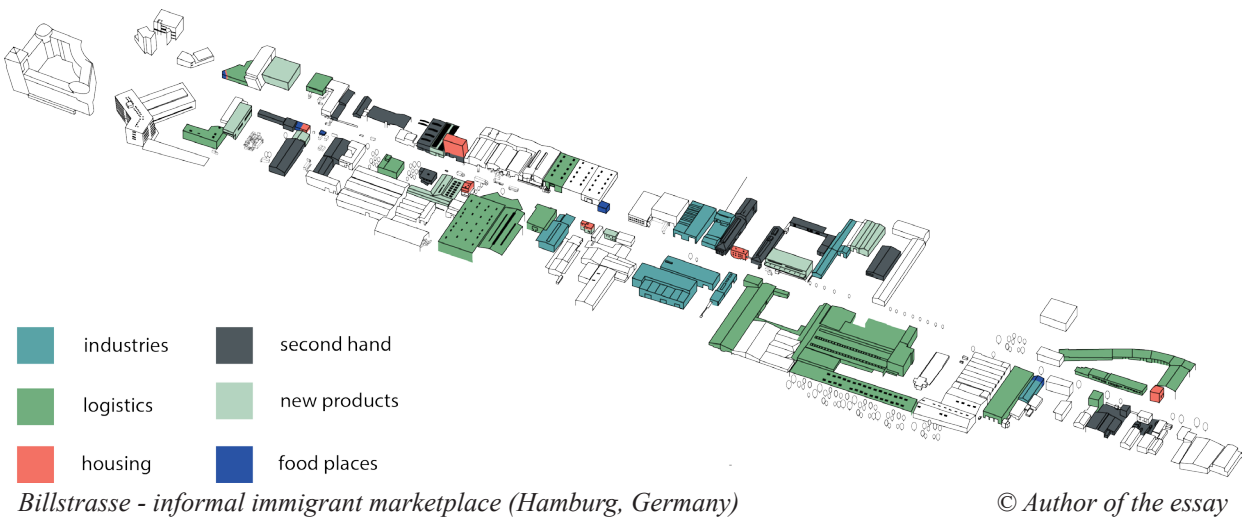


Kibera - the largest slum (Nairobi, Kenya)

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Crisis of the Public

Almost 50 years after ‘the death of modernism’, it seems that governments and local officials tend to repeat mistakes of former era. Totalitarianism thinking can be referred to both policy making and city planning. As such, continuous development of single-use districts and secluded areas has roots in formal perspectives on city planning and development. This often plain approach of the state towards creation of space and subsequently public realm is no longer able to cover essential needs of its inhabitants. For most of them left no choice than simply take care of themselves. Housing crisis, together with myth of marginality, became a tool of repression caused by strengthening of hierarchical structures of both government and market-orientated projects. Such a phenomenon often ends in hostility towards government (Turner 1963) and its intervention. However, in many cases oppression works exactly in different way as it would be expected, especially when acting as a source of innovation and creativity – e.g. as De Soto puts it: “Informal economy is the people’s spontaneous and creative response to the state’s incapacity to satisfy the basic needs of the impoverished masses” (De Soto 1989: 14). Therefore there is historic opportunity in “heroic entrepreneurship” (De Soto 2000) of the commons to reinvent government on a more open, transparent and democratic.



Rise of the Civics

Era of smart technologies gives us such a big advantage. With rise of awareness and access to information new socially innovative groups arises; ‘civics’ can be described as citizens aware of its duties towards another citizens, as well as towards environment they live in. Different types of civic hacking foster bottom-up governing of contemporary cities, which often propose decentralized, and democratic alternative everywhere that industry attempts to impose its vision of clean, computed, centrally managed order (Townsend 2014). From social networks and open source software, to active involvement in the creation of public spaces and environmental issues, or even informal transformations of public realm, supporting of civic

culture through the focus on local appears to be a perfect scale for innovation processes in all three fields (governing, technologies, socio-economic). In order to create stability but also circulation is also necessary to think global, by creation of sub connections (e.g. trade routes and information flows), but still act as local as possible.



Rescue centre for 'street children' (Kibera - Nairobi, Kenya)

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Furthermore ‘civics’ can have significant impact on forging new and more effective work possibilities by creation of innovative economical fields with smaller impact on environment, health and socio-economic status. Computing, creative industries or innovative agriculture can overcome job loss, which was caused by restructuring processes.

But it’s obvious that neither state, nor active individuals can fully address both problems and potentials, which arise from new era of accelerated urbanization. As such, private sector appears to have most significant impact on development of innovations and shaping both private and public realm. Therefore ‘sustainopreneurship’ (Schaltegger 2000) offers unique combination of creative and innovative approaches towards contemporary entrepreneurship. Social enterprises thus can be seen as an example of sustainable business that doesn’t necessarily consider profit as a determinant of success. Focus is put on provision of job opportunities, social and environmental sustainability, with subsequent acceleration of social, technological and economical innovations. In short, such a business is focused on social and economical growth of employees, rather than of employer.

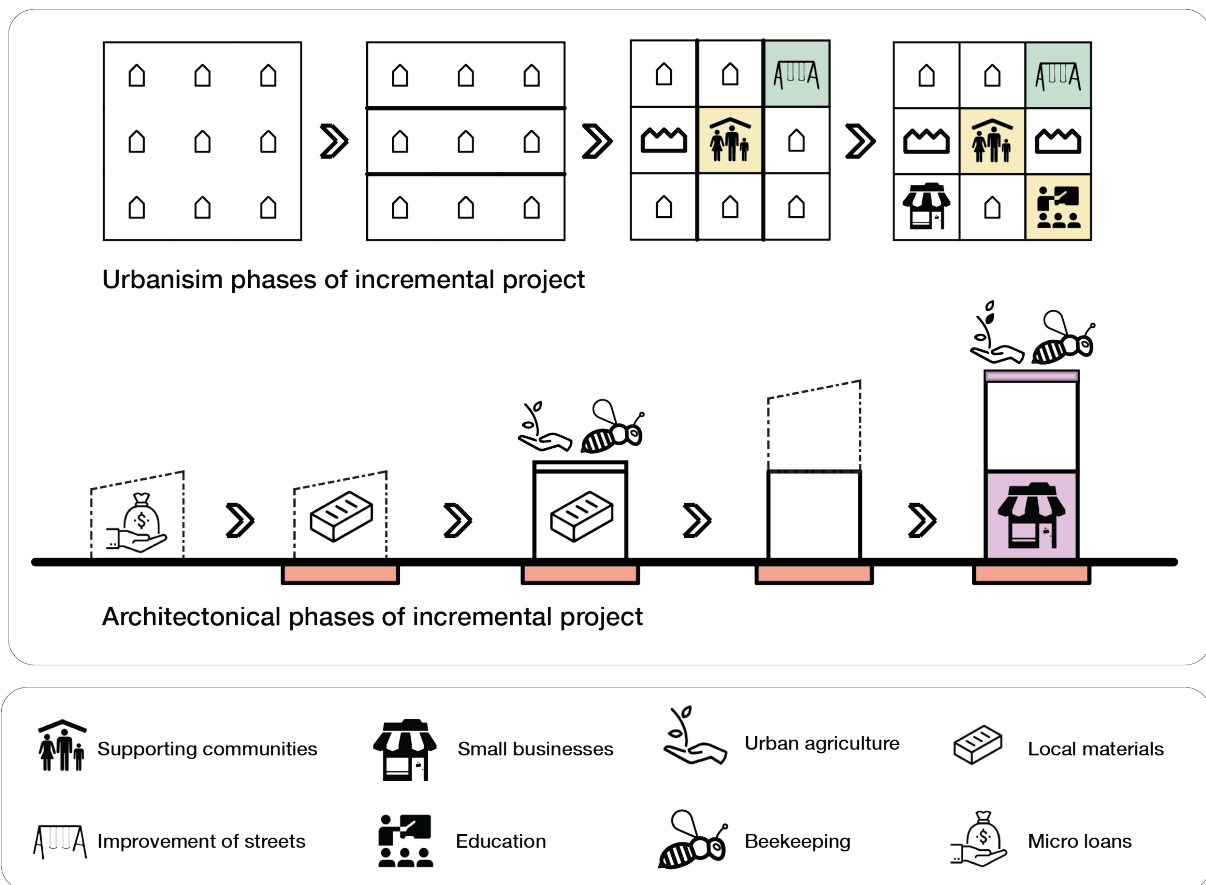


Self-help project DOM.OV for Roma population (Rankovce, Slovakia)

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Think the Present, Build the Future

Smart city could be solution. But in order to create more effective, but also more inclusive Smart cities, which preserve opportunities for spontaneity, serendipity, and sociability, we need to first overcome bipolar way of looking on geographies of both theory and practice. In today's globalized era 'developed' world is being penetrated by 'developing' world, and the other way around, more than ever. Geographies are shifting and differences are being blurred. Smart City – the global city can be than referred to the process, rather than to a place (Castells 1996). As such, I believe that this 'work in progress' (think Smart City) should be approached by small incremental changes instead of a few extensively planned large jumps. It also opens the possibility of searching for innovative methods of urbanisation, since cities have become an unlimited construct of interactions that provides both social stimuli and economical advantages.



Principles of incremental development

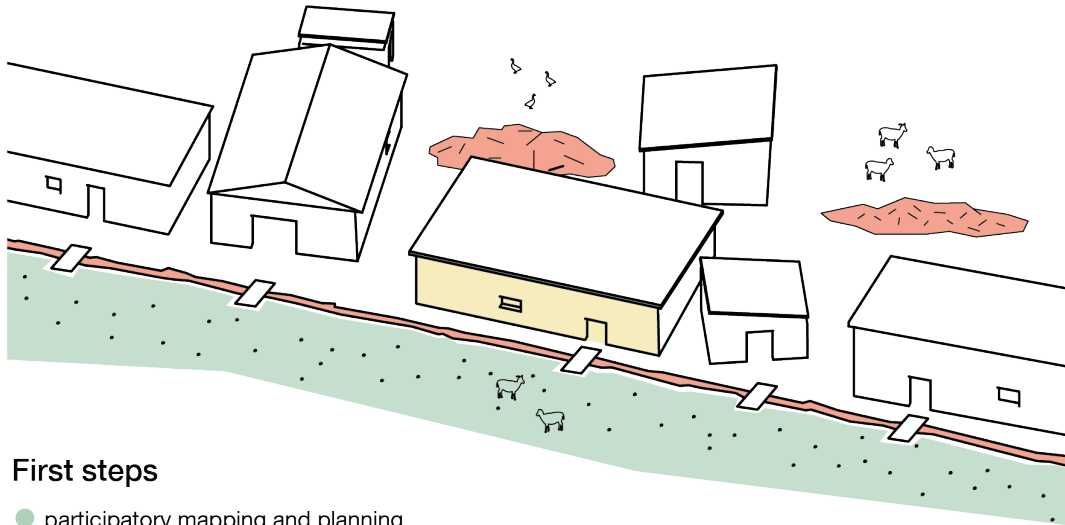
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Education plays a key role not only in gaining of technical skills, which serve as natural asset in gaining an advantage on the market, but also in building of civic society and developing of social skills. Therefore, in order to enhance social, economical and technical innovations, focus should be put on creation of more vibrant and mixed urban environment. Moreover, automation isn't an inherently wrong process.

It can have great contribution in fields (e.g. heavy industry and mass production), which jeopardise hundreds of thousands of working poor and focus on development of new economical fields. On the other hand we should focus on organic reinvention of contemporary urbanization. Focus should be put on sustainable agriculture in order to overcome challenges of the final step of planet's colonization. Together with support of social enterprises, agriculture could be the key that mitigate the impact of contemporary urbanisation on our environment, as well as job loss caused by automation. With surplus of accessible food we can expect enhance in all fields of innovations (Childe 1936). Furthermore, decentralized, organic and thrifty model could be the way towards more sustainable urbanization.

All and all emphasis should be put on long-term survival instead of short term gain, and we should focus on cooperation and sharing of good practices, rather than on competition and run to the bottom. Moreover, poverty and subsequent marginalization caused by lack of job opportunities is not technical, but socio-economical problem (Engels 1844). Society thus needs to develop from mechanic to organic tolerance. Therefore it's important to not only address the landscaping of our environment, but also landscaping of public realm. From social housing, to start-up initiatives and local farming, it's necessary that everybody feels involved, regardless of their income, gender, and status or job title. This can enhance process of pro-social behaviour of 'care and repair' (Low, Iveson 2016) in public realm. This includes caring for others and participating in the repair of the environment. And technology is just another tool in a toolbox, which can be use to solve problems of today's world. Sometimes it can be helpful to look back in order to see ahead.

Main street - current status

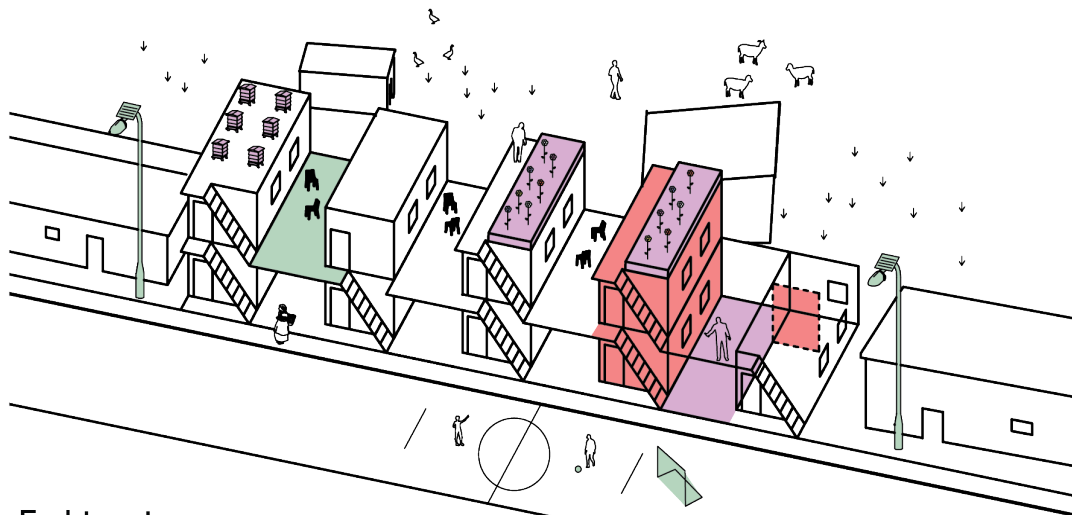


First steps

- participatory mapping and planning
- picking and recycling of plastic waste
- artistic workshops to improve visual quality of dwellings



Main street - design



Furhter steps

- community public spaces & system of residential street
- social housing emphasis on self-help, local materials & additive development
- active parter (small businesses), urban roof gardening (production of flowers) & beekeeping

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