

MSG Moderne Stadtgeschichte, Bd. 50/1 (2019), 164-166

DOI: 10.60684/msg.v50i1.2019113

Verena Kröss

**Tagungsbericht: Transforming Cities: Urbanization and International
Development Policies in the 'Global South' in the Twentieth Century**

MSG Moderne Stadtgeschichte

ISSN: 2941-6159 online

<https://moderne-stadtgeschichte.de>

Dieses Werk steht unter der [Lizenz Creative Commons Namensnennung 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Bei den Abbildungen sind eingeschränkte Lizenzformen möglich, Weiternutzungsrechte
sind gesondert abzuklären.

© Verena Kröss 2019



Tagungsbericht: *Transforming Cities: Urbanization and International Development Policies in the 'Global South' in the Twentieth Century*

Berlin, 11.10. – 12.10.2018

Worldwide processes of urbanization and ever-growing percentages of people living in cities have been a defining characteristic of the history of the second half of the twentieth century. In the 'global South' rapid urban growth in post-colonial metropolises and the emergence of Megacities fundamentally altered the living conditions of millions of people, raised hopes and anxieties, and created new challenges for local administrators, national governments, and international development institutions. The conference successfully brought together and connected two different fields of historical enquiry, namely urban history and the history of development and modernization, with a focus on different cities and countries in the 'global South'. The conference gathered different case studies from several continents, and ranged from analyses of the late colonial period to the current day.

The first session examined the importance of the colonial setting for urban planning policies and the colonial legacies of urban development after independence. BERNARDO PINTO DA CRUZ (Lisbon) argued that the history of urban planning cannot be detached from the involvement of modernist designers in colonial policies and from the colonial circumstances in which new architectural styles emerged. He emphasized that urban planning models in Angola were profoundly shaped by the counter-subversive logic of the Portuguese colonial war effort. TIM LIVSEY (Oxford) analyzed the importance of the late colonial moment for urban development policies after independence in West Africa. Livsey showed that Reservations remained in place as a socially segregated form of housing in post-independence Lagos, as postcolonial political elites and Africans working in the civil service moved in to replace white British colonial officers.

MARKUS DAECHSEL (London) afterwards analyzed the engagement of the Greek planner and architect C.A. Doxiadis in Pakistan under Ayub Khan. He argued that against Doxiadis' conception development projects in Pakistan re-politicized urban spaces and invited sovereignty games that were inherently political.

TOBIAS WOLFFHARDT (Munich) emphasized the structural difficulties that newly independent West African governments faced in the fields of housing construction and urban development. He showed how the United Nations Program of Technical Assistance filled the gaps that the departure of colonial building experts and trained architects had left behind. The provision of international expertise, however, not only unfolded against the backdrop of practical challenges on the ground, but was also embedded in broader debates about the meaning of urbanism in independent Sub-Saharan Africa and the intricate relationship between urbanism and modernization.

In her keynote NANCY KWAK (San Diego) engaged with questions of control, disorder and “unruly urbanism” in cities. Using slum clearance schemes in current day Manila as a starting point, Kwak drew attention to the conflicting visions of urban disorder between poor city dwellers and governments. Exploring the history of the city from the vantage point of those differences, she pointed out, would allow both a deeper understanding of the absence of total control over cities and a better sense of the “ungoverned” as well as a new perspective on power.

ANNE FENK (Berlin) and RACHEL LEE (Munich) analyzed an illustrative example of how international development projects during the Cold War provided spaces for “unlikely collaborations” between East and West. Both showed that the development of the master plan for Abuja, the new Nigerian capital planned after the Biafran war, involved multiple international actors spanning five different continents, including architects from East Germany and Poland. In the end, those international collaborations on the ground translated into grand visions of the new capital that paid little attention to local conditions.

The fifth session was comprised of two case studies investigating urban planning in Latin America in its relationship to political ruptures. ANDRA CHASTAIN (Vancouver, Washington) showed how the construction of the metro in Santiago de Chile survived all major political ruptures of the 1970s. As she argued, the involvement of France in the metro project was crucial for the shape, survival, and implementation of the project beyond all political upheavals. France provided foreign exchange in crucial moments when the large project was about to stop and the presence of French planners shielded the metro system from the growing influence of the “Chicago Boys” during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. LEANDRO BENMERGUI (Purchase, NY) analyzed the Federal Housing Plan in Argentina which was introduced at the beginning of the 1960s by the conservative minister of economy Álvaro Alsogaray. The Housing Plan relied on the creation of a mortgage market and on the expansion of homeownership. Benmergui observed that Alsogaray defended these housing policies as a shift away from the political principles of past Peronist

housing and welfare politics favoring the organized working class to a “non-political” reliance on market mechanisms. However, the creation of a housing market also required very active state politics and called for large foreign investments to jumpstart this market.

The last session brought the theme of nature back to the city. SABRINA KIRSCHNER (Munich) investigated the growing awareness towards the problem of air pollution in Mexico City since the 1950s and Mexico’s participation in the first transnational air pollution monitoring network set up in 1967 by the Pan American Health Organization. SÖNKE KUNKEL (Berlin) examined how urban earthquake risks became a new concern for international development institutions in the 1960s. Partly driven by global headlines but also by the promises of the rising disciplines of seismology and earthquake engineering, he showed, international institutions made the prevention and mitigation of urban disasters a new theme in their policies. Thereby, they also contributed to a gradual global rethinking of security towards more individual concepts of human security.

The conference demonstrated that bringing together a focus on urban history with an analysis of the history of development is a fruitful perspective for future research. Specifically, the following questions and problems emerged from the general discussions:

First urban development history cannot be isolated from analyses of the region. In particular, the connection between rural and urban spaces needs to be addressed more fully. Secondly, the participants discussed the relevance of political change vis-à-vis physical structures and buildings in the city. While it is important to trace political changes and their influence on cities some contributors argued that historians might sometimes be prone too much to assuming the relevance of politics in influencing physical structures which follow their own logics and path dependencies. A third theme centered on the historical critique of planning and of modernist aspirations and development models. While there are many examples of dysfunctional planning meriting critical historical scrutiny, several speakers questioned the critique of modernist city planning that was present in many papers particularly against the background of the absence of such planning today and the financialization of housing and the city.