

A Global History of urban development policies since 1945

The 'urban challenge' is a major issue in global development policies. This has mainly to do with the dramatic growth of cities. Since 1980, the number of megacities (cities with more than 10 million people) has increased from 3 to 25. More than half of the world population lives in cities, and, according to the UN, it will be two-thirds in 25 years. Accordingly, development policies increasingly take place in urban spaces. And it addresses specifically urban challenges such as infrastructure, housing, and the management of resources and utilities.

Against this background it seems surprising that until now only few studies exist which explore the entangled history of urbanization and development policy. It is all the more surprising given the fact that rapid urbanization was a major phenomenon of the 20th century, especially in developing countries. For instance, Nairobi (founded 1896) increased from a few hundred to 49.000 (1936) to 267.000 (1962) to around five million in 1990. Jakarta transformed itself from a city of 150.000 into a megacity of 20 million people within a century. Those dynamics impacted in a fundamental way on living conditions of millions of people, compressed societies in narrow spaces, raised expectations, anxieties, and the need to improvise on the part of old and new urban dwellers. And it confronted urban administrations with huge social, ecological and infrastructural problems. Following World War II, global development policies turned its attention to cities. By the mid-1970s, development economists such as Michael Lipton detected a veritable "urban bias" in development policies.

The project analyses the history of urban development policies between 1945 and 1992. In this sense, it assumes that development policies are policies that were undertaken for developing countries. However, from this specific angle, the project seeks to provide important insight into the general history of urbanization in the 20th century. Based on notions of 'global governance', and utilizing a 'multi-centered' writing of history, basic questions shall be addressed which are also of relevance for the social sciences, geography, and anthropology. When, why and how did urban development policies develop as a new global policy field? What kind of development doctrines and strategies did the actors involve conceive? How did these change over time, and why did they do so? Which local ramifications did urban development projects have?

The project investigates these questions in two partial projects. These itemize different sets of problems of urban development policies; however, they look at roughly the same actors. This ensures a high degree of homogeneity among the partial projects and guarantees exchange and cross-fertilization. Partial project 1 investigates the change of global perceptions, discourses and developmental approaches in regard to a need for housing in cities of developing countries, a need which manifested itself since the 1940s by the proliferation of so-called 'slums'. The partial project makes use of a biographical approach and focuses on a group of globally active experts who were instrumental for urban development policies of international organizations between the 1940s and the 1970s. Partial project 2 looks at the environmental dimension of urban development policy. It is concerned with perceptions and handling of urban environmental pollution since the 1970s. More concretely, the example of Mexico City is used to investigate air pollution; Sao Paulo is selected as a focus on water pollution; and Singapore has been selected in order to analyze changing conceptions of soft categories such as life quality. The actors addressed comprise the World Bank, the WHO, UNEP and the Ford Foundation.