

“Strengthening and expanding the network”



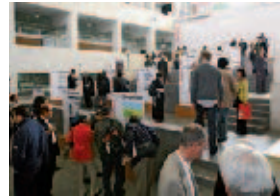
Interview with Hans-Rudolf Schalcher, member of the Management Board, head of the Technical Competence Center (TCC) of the Holcim Foundation, and Professor for Planning and Construction Management at ETH Zurich, who moderated the 2007 Holcim Forum.

Today in the virtual world, experts can exchange information anytime and anyplace. Why then should international meetings such as the Holcim Forum be held?

Exchanging knowledge and experience without personal contact is simply not enough. I see also in my own work that the use of video conferences is declining; direct face-to-face exchange remains irreplaceable.

Why was Shanghai chosen as the Forum location?

First, of course, because of the close connection to Tongji University, which is a partner university of the Holcim Foundation and contributes to the TCC. In addition, Shanghai is a unique laboratory for urban development. I believe that the rate of change here is matched by no other city in the world. In Shanghai, we are witnessing urban transformation in fast forward, so to speak. And finally, it seems to me that the awareness of the issue of megacities is greater here than elsewhere. Shanghai is earnestly tackling the problems that massive population growth entails.



Student posters were exhibited throughout the forum in the lobby of the main auditorium (see page 60).

What were your expectations before the Forum?

Primarily, we wanted to strengthen the network of academics and practitioners. Regarding urban development, it is really important that all stakeholders contribute to the exchange. The second Holcim Forum was also intended to strengthen the bonds that formed among the group that attended the Forum in Zurich in 2004. We must expand this network still further – and activate it even more.

How practice-related is such a Forum? Urban development is subject to countless contextual conditions. Can theoretical discussion lead to anything useful at all?

Urban transformation is not unplanned, rampant development. We are not powerless in the face of change! Urban development is shaped by building codes, zoning ordinances, communal needs, investors and governments. Everywhere there are great opportunities to exert influence.

You have spent several months in Shanghai.

What is it about this megacity that interests you?

The will of the people to change things – and at the same time their friendliness. For someone from Switzerland, where the wheels usually turn at slower pace, it is fascinating to see here how much movement can be achieved. In record time, skyscrapers are raised, bridges built, plans realized. That is, in spite of the downside that such development of course can have, simply fascinating.



Signal to end a break in classic Swiss style.