

A More Socially and Environmentally Sustainable City

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Today the market economy has been adopted by the entire world as the best way to manage most of society's resources – and though resources are used very efficiently, nonetheless, a market economy creates income inequality. But there are other forms of equality, such as the quality of life, or making effective the democratic principle which states that the public good must prevail over private interests. Cities can do much to create equality, and I believe that this should be one of the main criteria when designing cities.

Tell a three-year-old: *Watch out! A car!* The child will jump in fright, and with good reason. There are some 200,000 children killed by cars every year. Today cars are to children what wolves used to be to children in the Middle Ages. But in any given week in our world today, there are as many children killed by cars as by wolves in the whole of the Middle Ages. What is more disturbing is that our society is not troubled by this. After some 5,000 years of urban history, and hopefully, progress, are we content to know that children grow up in fear of getting killed? Once I saw a documentary about some herons in a Brazilian wet-



land. When baby herons are learning to fly, they often fall into the water, where hungry alligators can devour them. I feel sympathy for the herons' parents. They live in circumstances in which their

Fig. 1: Lack of pedestrian infrastructure reflects insufficient democracy. (Johannesburg).

Fig. 2: Even school children are less important than cars and their owners when there is inequality. (Dar Es Salaam).

children are in permanent risk of being killed. But then it dawned upon me that our children, likewise, grow up under a similar predicament: the permanent fear of being hit by a car.

In terms of urban quality of life, the 20th century will be remembered as a disastrous one. We have built cities much more for the mobility of cars than for human happiness. Today we look upon 1800 London as a horrible living environment. Yet, at that time, it was the most advanced city in the world and regarded by all others as an example. I am certain that in 300 years people will look upon our cities today and perceive them as appallingly undesirable as we now perceive 1800 London. And, of course, the 20th century's most successful society, the United States of America, was the one that inflicted the most damage because it had the resources to pursue the prevailing model to its fullest.

The question is: do we dare create a different, better city? There will be two billion more inhabitants in Asian cities alone over the next 50 years. Cities will more than triple their population and their built area. What is yet to be built around today's developing world cities will practically be built from scratch. Are we going to repeat our mistakes? If we had a magic wand and we could dispose of half of Paris, London or New York, for example, I am sure that they would be rebuilt totally differently. But the new cities of developing countries are bad copies of what we already have.

We tend to copy the worst elements from the advanced cities; we replicate their mistakes, not only the elevated highways and low density suburbs, but also the lacking network of pedestrian streets, and so on.

The measure of a civilization's success is not its GDP or its technology but its citizens' happiness. A quality city can provide an endless source of joy. Cities can provide even more joy than material consumption. Yet, in the new post-industrial society and its service economy, the most critical competitive factor will be the quality of life. What is critical is to attract and retain the most qualified and creative individuals, and certainly quality of life is necessary in order to achieve that. In the past, the greatest source of wealth was land. Countries and states waged territorial war on each other. Later, capital became the source of wealth. All sorts of subsidies were given to attract capital to nations or states. But in the new economy, the most crucial element is people. So in the end, designing good cities for people, for happiness and equity, has become a crucial element for economic competitiveness, as they attract and retain creative and productive individuals.

Political pressures from car owners and other car-related interests have become so massive, that often it is forgotten that cities are for people and not for cars. And this is even more so in the developing world. But can we design a transporta-