



# 1.3 The new urban agenda ‘on the ground’ – overriding the urban/non-urban divide

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**Date** Monday, 20 April 2015

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## Rapporteur

Katleen De Flander – IASS

## Session Hosts

IASS – Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (Germany)

ANCB – The Aedes Metropolitan Laboratory (Germany)

This session was open to the wider public (upon registration)

31 GSW participants and 85 external participants registered for this session

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## Session Description

### Critical Dialogues Series

This session is the first in a series of critical dialogues, which the IASS is initiating and facilitating on the practicalities of implementing the new urban agenda – and its possible constraints – in the political context of Habitat III (UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, 2016). Each of these public dialogues addresses a topic of central importance to Habitat III from **1) an unconventional angle** and **2) an ‘on the ground’ perspective**. The series aims to not only involve ‘the usual suspects’ but particularly brings different expertise into the debate.

### Dialogue.01: Overriding the Urban/Non-Urban Divide

This first dialogue takes an **unconventional angle** by addressing new approaches that transcend the urban age discussion (e.g. 50 % live in cities) and break with the idea of the bounded city in which the urban and the non-urban are opposed and spaces are classified, according to their form, on the urban-rural continuum. What if, as Brenner and Schmid’s critical urban theory on planetary urbanisation suggests, the putative non-urban is internalised in the theory of urbanization and we no longer talk about form but about processes of concentrated and extended urbanisation? What does this shift mean when we address resource flows, food security and inequality issues? The practical perspectives from **Chennai, Bogota and Jakarta** ground the debate in reality and form the basis of a critical discussion on the ‘New Urban Agenda’ and its ‘Urban-Rural Linkages’.

## Programme

14:00

### Welcome and short intro

Katleen De Flander, IASS (Germany), Áine Ryan, ANCB (Germany)

14.10

### Keynote: Provincialising planetary urbanisation: situating Chennai between its region and the global

Pushpa Arabindoo, UCL Urban Laboratory, University College London (UK)

14.35

### Keynote: Special Administrative Planning Region – Central Region. A case of new territorial arrangements that seek to overcome the urban-rural dichotomy

Carolina Chica Builes, Secretariat of Planning, Bogotá (Colombia),

15:00

### Keynote: When does the urban come, does it go, or does it simply change course and form, all of the time? Reflections from Jakarta

AbdouMaliq Simone, Max Planck Institute for Social and Ethnic Diversity, (Germany) and Goldsmiths College, University of London (UK)

15.25

### Coffee Break

15.45

### Critical debate: The new urban agenda ‘on the ground’ – overriding the urban/non-urban divide

**Critical framing and moderation:** Pieter de Vries, Wageningen University (The Netherlands)

Pushpa Arabindoo, UCL Urban Laboratory, University College London (UK)  
Carolina Chica Builes, Secretariat of Planning, Bogotá (Colombia)  
AbdouMaliq Simone, Max Planck Institute for Social and Ethnic Diversity, (Germany) and Goldsmiths College, University of London (UK)

17:05

### Informal Discussions

20

## Video documentation

Please find the video documentation of this session here:

<http://www.ancb.de/sixcms/detail.php?id=15509467#.VV7nos59021>

## Summary

**Katleen De Flander (IASS)** opened the session by introducing the Dialogues Series and its intentional critical approach of the Habitat III process, followed by a brief intro to the planetary urbanisation theory. **Áine Ryan (ANCB)** welcomed the public from the ANCB side.

**Pushpa Arabindoo (UCL)** reflected on the planetary urbanisation discourse from her 13 years of ethnographic research and experience in the Indian City of Chennai. What happens when we post-colonialize it? What happens when we try to provincialize planetary urbanisation? She reacts on 3 core arguments from Brenner and Schmid: 1) the urban as a theoretical construct; 2) the spatiality/scale of the urban and 3) the urban can not be reduced to a category of practice.

### *Some extracts:*

- In the Indian context, the driving analytical tool of the urban is still the Census (every 10 years) and there is a value to the numbers here:
  - It helps to grasp India's nature of urbanisation in the last 2 decades (in terms of the speed of urbanisation and in terms of apocalyptic scenarios that are often portrayed).
  - It shows the need to focus on the small towns as much as on the metropolises.
  - It forces us to think what is the rural-urban divide. For every city, the story is different. It is often more a question of governance than the theoretical question of what is urban and what is non-urban.
- Is the right to the city still tenable when the urban condition is planetary and the geographies of the political are being so radically rearranged? An obvious conclusion to draw from this analysis would be to retreat from the right to the city altogether.... But instead, it stands as a challenge to produce new forms of critical urban theory and political practice that can help promote more democratic, socially just, and environmentally sane ways of appropriating, managing, and developing the common resources of our rapidly urbanizing planet. In Chennai, people do fight for the right to the city (the example of slum activists fighting against evictions was given).

**Carolina Chica Builes (Secretariat of Planning, Bogota)** introduced a practical case of new territorial arrangements that seek to overcome the urban-rural dichotomy: Special Administrative Planning Region – Central Region, an institutional mechanism of territorial-regional management and coordination (created in September 2014).

### *Some extracts:*

- The regions (called 'departments' in Colombia) agreed on the following 5 lines of work: 1) Environmental sustainability and risk management (basic aspect of this is water, highly vulnerable to climate change and pollution); 2) transport infrastructure, logistics, public services; 3) Competitiveness and international outreach; 4) Food security and rural economy and 5) Governance and good government (functional network of cities integrated with its rural area in order to assure a de-concentrated model)
- The model is based on the recognition that city sustainability depends exclusively on the good management of its interdependent close links with its urban and non-urban immediate surroundings. The city draws 75% of its water from the Paramo systems (part of 2 different departments), 77% of fresh food comes from 300km radius around Bogota.

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- This is above all a huge political achievement: the Central Region is a new figure of supra-local government in Colombia with administrative and financial autonomy.
  - This is the first legally constituted region in Colombia, others are interested in following
  - Bogota is providing 75% of the financial resources of the Central Region, the other 4 departments bring the other 25%
  - The decisions of the general council, affect the 4 regions and Bogota directly. So far, the decision making process was consensus-based.
  - There is now a political conflict with the national government, which feels threatened by this new institutionalised Region.

**AbdouMaliq Simone (Max Planck Institute)** gave a passionate talk exposing the heterogeneity and multiplicity of Jakarta, celebrating urban creativity and plurality and exposing the urban as a force in itself. The City as a fragile, inconsistent and precarious area but at the same a place where people experiment, construct lives, etc.

*Some extracts:*

- Jakarta has many different kinds of interfaces. There are interfaces between the core and the periphery but just as well within the periphery and within the core. These interfaces are often not looked at in terms of their generativity or instability.
- Jakarta often grew on the fact of the heterogeneity of its built environment. Upscaled built environments sometimes provide cover for the poor to live in contiguous and proximate relations. We need to know more about the relationship of these interfaces, what are the dynamics? How do we describe them so we don't jump to conclusions?
- The relationship between the intensive and extensive is not a matter of one ruling out the other, of an intersection between the top-down and the ground-up.
- The gradation of space into clearly delineated ownership and functions can often impede the elaboration of collaborative work. The only way that Jakarta works is the very way that the Worldbank criticizes Jakarta for not working, which is that there is no urban land. 1% of all of Jakarta land is held in free title. That ambiguity of land status enables the kind of platform that generates the plurality of different kinds of collective possibilities that residents can turn to in order to keep costs down, to enable themselves to keep some kinds of place in the city.
- Built environments become the objects of reshaping so they might mediate the provisioning of various affordances – to act alternatively as residences, markets, community centres, workshops, storage spaces, retail outlets, and social hubs.
- We need to inhabit urban life as a paradox: nothing is completely ruled out or controlled but at the same time, not everything is possible

### Discussion:

After a short break **Pieter de Vries (Wageningen University)** brought the introduction and the 3 very different keynotes together

#### *Some extracts:*

- These ways of creating consensus (as we heard this morning: we have to be united as humanity in order to deal with the crises of humanity) are quite depoliticising, a kind of post-politics
- What we see is the creation of very strong divides at the planetary level, this policy talk is often used in order to make possible the agendas of very big business interests
- Expulsions are very important, it is about the emergence of new categories at the global level (the part of no part (author: Rancière), people with wasted lives, think about the boat people in the Mediterranean)
- If we are going to talk about global democracy, it is more about disagreeing than about agreeing with each other
- Planning always assumes the idea of stability. What to do with a city where people are continuously moving around. Can we make a photograph of a situation that is always unstable, inconsistent? Insurgent planning. Planning in places that are to outcome of auto construction. City planning becomes and intervention in the interventions of people themselves. What is important is the political programs that go together with it.
- Proposes to frame the discussion around Urban commons (following Hardt and Negri, David Harvey)

#### *Extracts from the discussion, question/points raised:*

##### **What role do you see at the UN level?** (conflict between global and local level)

- **Carolina:** facilitate coordination between the local agents on the ground, to mediate on our negotiations. Local governments are gaining power, they can make decisions and decide not to follow the directions of the national government. Communities are getting empowered (to stop mining, ...), they are getting more involved in public issues.
- **Pushpa:** Worldbank was influencing strongly in Chennai. First through Master plans (very Western view). Next came project based poverty eradication. More recently (Washington consensus) public-private partnerships. Consultants flying in showing Miami waterfronts in Chennai (unrealistic policy models). In terms of participatory planning (remains a lip service), all documents are in English (not translated in local language) and meetings are held in 5-star hotels, excluding a large majority of the common population. Jargon is still techno-expert driven. UN Sust. Cities programme influence not clear.
- **AbdouMaliq:** some decades ago there were more textures of between UNDP, multi-lateral agencies, .... that could be used for more experimentation at the local level. These have more and more disappeared, there is an increased consolidation. You have to enter into that global game somehow, you have no choice. These discourses that are elaborated there are used on a local level e.g. to give coverage, to excuse themselves etc

Connection between the presentations and Planetary Urbanisation = have to do with operational connections rather than urban form. If you take these linkages (and not form) as an approach to understanding development, what is the next step for planning? We have super tools and data (GIS) at the macro scale BUT we have so much research in the ground but little data that we can work with in planning. **How to make the connection between ethnography and planetary urbanisation in terms of resources and tools for urban planning and design?**

- **Pushpa:** every city has a history, bring different social science methodologies and ethnographies into the planning process to show that there is no such thing as a 'blank slate'. We do not need sophisticated tools necessary, we need to use unsophisticated methods but they can be very powerful. This is an answer as to how you can plan the urban as a process rather than urban as a category or urban as a product.
- **Áine:** Could this be a recommendation for Habitat III: start to collect data that is intangible; on things that you can't see from satellites. It is difficult and time-consuming and expensive to collect this kind of data, and because of this, they often fall out of the conversations. Because of this, it almost should be a mandate to collect cultural data.
- **Pushpa:** if you scale in and out constantly, it should not be such a burdensome task. Urban design and planning has forgotten its elasticity. We have to recover this. We should not be pre-occupied with the visualisation tools we have. (also problem with glossy images of planetary urbanisation theory)
- **AbdouMaliq:** 35% of fruits and vegetables in Jakarta comes from and auto-constructed night market (the next morning there are almost no traces that it existed) with no authority that says how this complex system is going to work. Intricate negotiations amongst many actors. Works extremely well and effectively. Meanwhile, the official municipal markets are empty. Why not take some of these municipal employees and let them find out how this auto-constructed market actually works. What are the details? Use this as a basis to think through new elaborations of policy and municipal governance. It is a totally different kind of planning.  
Pieter: planning brings us to power

### Global City has not been mentioned

Isn't it necessary to reclaim the city as a social space and not as an economic space?  
Educate the planners and politicians to administrate the city according to this.

- **Carolina:** goal of Bogota (and all changes go according to this) is for guaranteeing the city's sustainability. That is why the focus is not on the global markets but on the regional structure of market. Not only seen as an economic markets but also seen as ecosystem services. We are a global city but beyond that we have to guarantee the conditions for our communities to survive = different form of planning. Not global but regional!
- **Pushpa:** no Dubaisation of the center in Chennai, it shows alternatives of the multiple city, not the usual template of urbanism as Mumbai, Signapore, ....., politicians will not use the term global city (rather world-class city). We need to pay equal attention to unexceptionalism.

### Soils

- **Carolina:** Bogota has strong regulations on quality of soil and its uses to preserve certain soils for agricultural use. Legal restrictions to urbanisation (very difficult because in the end the market rules)
- **Pushpa:** you can do a scientific classification of soil types but what does it lead to? It has very limited imagination. You have to rethink in terms of the larger ecology and nature question in the urban context. Rethinking urban nature (project) brings issues of soil, nature, ..... in, but strips it from the scientific straightjacketing.

### Final Round

**Pieter:** to what extent does it matter to engage with policies and planning and with these big Habitat shows? Creation of dualism, binaries, ...

One of the challenges is how to protect the kinds of commons such as the autoconstructed market in Jakarta.

**AbdouMaliq:** How to use the extending of metropolitan boundaries and scales of governance and planning and coordination as possible mechanisms to facilitate the possibility of redistribution (of economic resources and opportunities) in a world where otherwise redistribution is not on the table.

**Carolina:** We have to think in compensation, about equation mechanisms! The urban/non-urban dichotomy is no longer valid. Urban exists because there is a rural support to it. You cannot refer development only to the urban, we have to switch the idea to compensation mechanisms between the urban and the non-urban in order to bring development conditions to those scenarios. The new policies on development should contemplate the exchange of experiences regarding compensation mechanisms. (compensation to those municipalities which protect water, preserve the soils for agricultural production, ....)

**Pushpa:** we should not be completely dismissive of what UN Habitat is trying to do. They are not naive. They are recognising the urban – rural continuum (and not their dichotomy). What they are missing is a theoretical sophistication. Planetary urbanisation is however the other extreme, where everything is seen as urban, which cannot be absorbed in the current political processes. We need a lot of definitional clarity at the moment. In India, the urban is understood only in terms of urban agglomerations and cities, there is nothing else. How do we define the other landscapes?

### Follow-up

This session was the first in a Series of Critical Dialogues, please follow the further development of the Series and its outcomes here:

<http://globalsoilweek.org/thematic-areas/transforming-cities/critical-dialogue-platform>

and in the near future here:

[www.criticalurbanagenda.de](http://www.criticalurbanagenda.de)