

Future Cities



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Virtual World

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Editorial

When we hear of future cities, we may imagine a set of high skyscrapers and amazing designed buildings packed with flying cars hovering above them. Usually we've seen such scenes in science-fiction movies, yet the issue of future cities is something more than scientific or non-scientific fictions dealing with the real matter of "urban planning".

Nowadays in many countries the rapid increase of population in urban areas and the growing number of citizens along with changes in the individuals' standard of living and their movements or the problems of industrial zones, have introduced the necessity of urban planning as a real need especially in coordination with human's changing needs. In addition to such problems which empower the motivation required for urban planning, bringing national and local levels together has shaped the need for urban planning in an established way.

Futurist urban planning deals with issues such as: the appropriateness of usages, upgrading health and education indicators, establishing infrastructural networks, developing social services, etc., that not only shape planning frameworks for future development, but also create necessary procedures for national development planning. So, upgrading current indicators is not the only important factor in urban planning, but also in finding proper ways for facing with emerging challenges in urban and human societies. The basis of contemporary planning activities especially in urban scale is composed of change in approaches regarding the stages of planning. Many urban planners have comprehended the necessity of forecasting trends and urban foresight.

What is being seen in urban planning especially major national and regional plans is an indication of a change in planners' perspectives from an explorative to a normative approach in predicting the future. It is obvious that the sole reliance on scientific and technological capabilities in solving contemporary problems may lead us into inappropriate and even false predictions in long term, gradually making more problems along with new developments for managers and planners. In explorative approach the planners view the future from present time, but in the new normative approach they consider the present time from the future and solve the present problems from the same future stance.

Perhaps the key problems of a city that should be solved with a glance on the future are issues like supplying drinking water, public transportation systems, the productivity of infrastructures, supplying green sources of energy, reducing the population concentration in metropolises, the emergence of a new generation of young elite force, applying new energies and innovation in industrial technologies. We should not forget that the civilization has reached a point in which a review on urban living and citizenship is inevitable.

According to a number of architects, the disturbance and concern over tall buildings is a reflex of the critical mind of modern architects who thought sometime in the past that the only solution for the problem of limited space was the vertical growth of the buildings. But now given the threats that endanger such buildings, the western urban planners believe that the era of high skyscrapers is coming to an end. Meanwhile, in some developing societies the urban planners go on with building more skyscrapers without thinking and regardless of what others have found in practice. Surprisingly they prefer to follow what was done in the west in past years or decades.

It is time to plan future cities according to the real needs of the citizens in each area without following other societies' obsolete plans. It is better to concentrate on our own original futures, rather than becoming interested in others' dead ended futures.



Step by Step toward Future Cities

Last year an international symposium was held in China under the title of "The Future of Cities, Human and the Health of Ecosystems". It was a joint effort by UNESCO and the United Nations program for Human and Biosphere Reserves at the global exhibition of Shanghai. The symposium held in October 2010 and various groups of scientists, researchers, designers and managers who were interested in building urban ecosystems attended the event to discuss the most important challenges facing the creation of ecosystems in local and regional levels. Meanwhile a broad range of observers and commentators aware of devastating impacts of urban industries on ecological and social capital and all who were able to draw the global heritage in urban area and its application in building future cities aiming their comments at the sustainable development, attended the symposium in order to face with the challenges raised by the collapse of natural conditions and provide a better adaptation with climate change.

From Theory to Action

At the symposium of "The Future of Cities, Human and the Health of Ecosystems" many workshops ran simultaneously by the experts embracing a wide range of topics related to the sustainable development in the future of the cities. Issues like designing eco-cities; rural, natural and urban systems; urbanization heritage; ecological architecture and managing the cities were discussed. In those four-day sessions it was suggested that different stages of urban ecology like differentiability, rush and replacement have emerged while urban population increases and the wave of the development continues in the outskirts of cities. The move of population, facilities, industries and urban organizations toward the outskirts have produced problems in urban ecosystem that has an important role not only in natural resources, but also in the healthy life of the cities and the citizens. These consequences are on the rise in most cities of the world as the international experts and policy makers have no choice, but to find proper solutions in order to protect the urban ecologies.

It seems that planning for building future cities in coordination with environmental considerations is a practical process and a real issue further than human's old dreams and ambitions that is being monitored by organizations like the UN. Regardless of holding such symposiums, other practical accomplishments are on the way. For example, IBM has introduced a project named as "Next Five in Five" that may revolutionize current cities into intelligent ones in the coming years.

IBM Information Company started the project about two years ago and has introduced five new innovations that may change the future of human life in the cities. The company has concentrated on the important problem of "how can we change the cities we are living in?" The innovations include: urban health systems, buildings that sense and react, cars and buses with empty fuel tanks, self-sufficient cities that quench their own citizens' thirst for drinking water, forecasting the crisis before reporting to the authorities.

In addition to these kinds of innovations, another important topic that is considered in planning for future cities is the "sustainable development". The sustainable development is a comprehensive, systematic, intra-generative and futurist development in which the benefits of no urban section are sacrificed for the expenses of other sections. Meanwhile, the benefits of today generation are not invested for the costs of the past or future generations as human privileges are not used to diminish other living things' rights.

Many developing countries are severely unstable and some reasons for this situation are: development with no care for culture, ecology and the citizens' benefits in the long run; lack of a directed comprehensive plan agreed jointly by both the government and urban management system. On the other hand, the citizens have usually no role in managing such cities and the wide scope of metropolises has made them unmanageable. These cities are dependent on fossil fuels for supplying their needed resources or disposing their wastes. What is produced in the cities as waste by citizens or the urban industries is buried in the suburbs which creates an important source of pollution for the city.