

UKNA Call for Papers

Thematic Group 3: “Future of Cities”

The urban challenge in the rapidly growing countries of Asia is well known: an estimated 1.1 billion people are expected to move to cities in Asia within the next 20 years. These new urban dwellers will join the ranks of the 2 billion or so people already living in cities in Asia¹. The urban billions in Asia will house themselves as best they can in city centers and on the urban outskirts, in slums and newly built satellite cities. As cities expand, so residents' lifestyles will change and their ecological footprint will increase.

These extraordinary trends raise many questions about the urban future in Asia. These questions cover space and society, economy and livelihoods, politics and institutions, and the environment. What will Asian cities look like in 20 years time? What will the quality of life be for their residents? How will they contribute to the identity of their inhabitants, involve them in public life, and relate to local culture and history? How will urban residents and migrants find work, access land, housing and services, and how will they feed themselves? What will be the state of infrastructure in Asian cities and the quality of urban air and water? How vulnerable will urban residents be to natural disasters? These and other questions are at the center of UKNA's focus on the future of Asian cities. The common thread linking all of these questions – as well as this theme to the two other UKNA themes – will be the identification and examination of long-term, transformative processes that increase the scope for the active engagement of urban residents in the creative production and shaping of their cities.

For nearly three decades now, Asian countries have been heralded as the drivers of worldwide economic growth. The greatest potential is considered to be in the highly industrialized urban centers and in locations with a high-technology infrastructure base. But the future of cities is about more than the economy alone. The overall objective of UKNA is to contribute to “*human flourishing*” in Asian cities of the future. This requires—among others—economic well-being, a clean and secure environment, and the right to the city in the areas of access to adequate housing, services, and “life spaces” in the form of culture, urban heritage, public spaces, and associational life.

Another set of challenges is in urban governance. How well are national—and perhaps even more important—city governments coping with fast urban growth? How are various institutions responding to urban challenges at many levels? How are different stakeholders and users of the city involved in local government decision-making? What forms of public-private partnerships and partnerships with local communities are being developed?

In discussing the future of “cities” it is impossible to overlook the role of the hinterland beyond the urban periphery. The regional scale is critically important to the urban population from the point of view of migration, planning, transportation, food security and the natural environment, including disaster management.

The Future of Cities research group invites contributions relating to the questions above, particularly with regard to technical, political and social implications of four overlapping sub-themes: access to basic services and resources; the meaning of public life and local identity; equity and affordability; and urban environment and climate change. The focus will be on cities of the *future*, but accurate insights about the future must be based on a coherent understanding of the urban present and past.

¹ Asian Development Bank (2008), “Managing Asian Cities”.



Access to housing, basic services and resources

Possible areas of examination:

- Gaps between the rich and poor in infrastructure, services, shelter and basic amenities;
- Stress on natural resources such as land and water;
- Urban heritage;
- Housing and urban redevelopment.

The meaning of public life and local identity

Possible areas of examination:

- Meaning and examples of historical continuity;
- Meaning of public life and civil society;
- Meaning of identity of people and places.

Equity and affordability

Possible areas of examination:

- Aspirations of urban residents;
- Livelihoods in the informal economy;
- Subaltern urbanism;
- “Right to the city”.

Urban environment and climate change

Possible areas of examination:

- Urban ecology and vulnerabilities;
- The urban hinterland and intra/inter-regional disparities;
- Natural disasters and disaster governance;
- Water management;
- Definitions and interpretations of “sustainability”.

