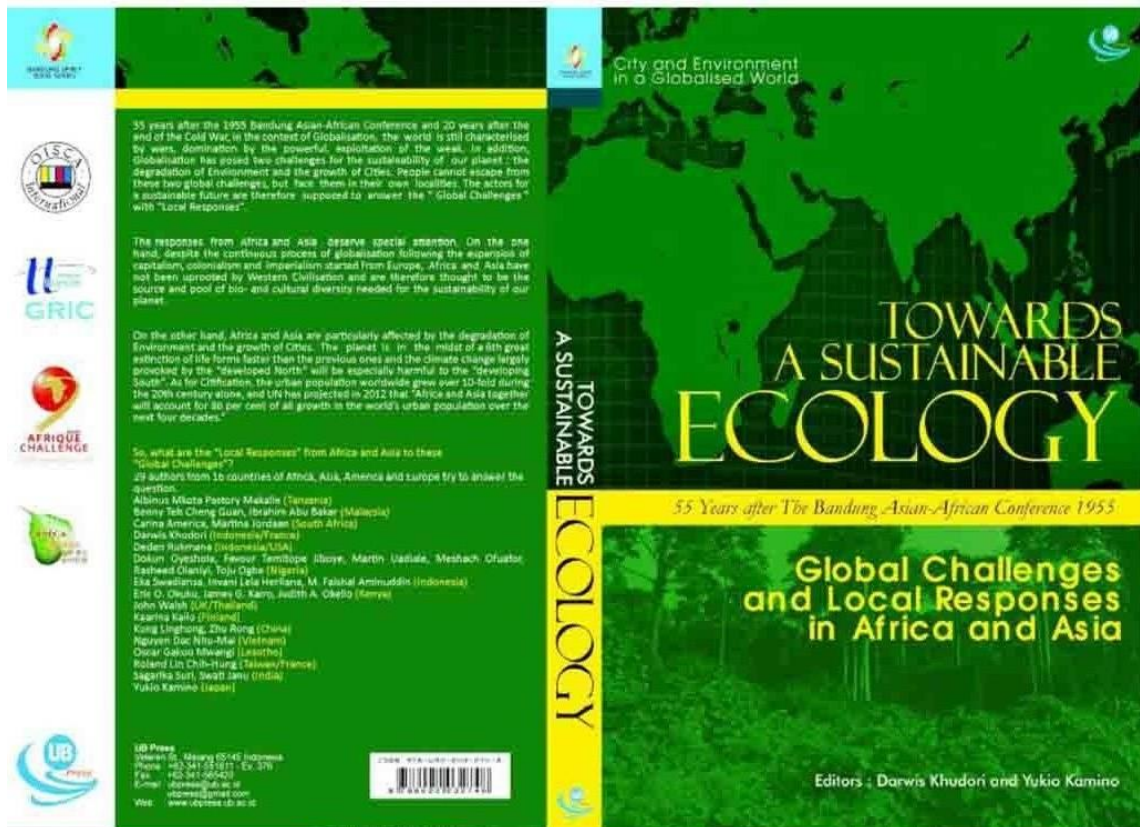


BANDUNG SPIRIT BOOK SERIES TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE ECOLOGY

Global Challenges and Local Responses in Africa and Asia
55 Years after the Bandung Asian-African Conference 1955

Editors: Darwis Khudori and Yukio Kamino



Swadiansa, E. (2012b). "From Urban Studies to Urban Architecture: Critiques on the Use of Eurocentric Theories in Shaping the Emerging Cities" In Kudhori, D., & Kamini, Y. (ed). *Towards a Sustainable Ecology: Global Challenges and Local Responses in Africa and Asia*. Published in 5 countries; Beijing: OCHSPA Alliance, Malang: UB Press, Paris: GRIC Le Havre Universite, Tokyo: OISCA International, Casablanca: Africa Challenge. Pp. 235-43. ISBN: 978-602-203-274-8.

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From Urban Studies to Urban Architecture: Critiques on the Use of Eurocentric¹ Theories in Shaping the Emerging Cities

Eka Swadiansa

ABSTRACT

The civilization of mankind today can be defined as an urban civilization. Historically speaking, 'Urban Theories' have originally been developed in Europe and later in the United States, thus today; their worldwide practices are always greatly influenced by the Eurocentric point of view. The Urban Theories were developed from 'Urban Studies and Urban Planning', to greater focus on 'Urban Design and Compact City', and to globally focus on 'Alpha City'; however, far from these established utopia, the emerging cities are still struggling for fulfilling the basic primordial needs among their proletarian citizen.

This paper is a two-section inquiry. The first provides a very brief historical dialectic of urban theories from its nineteenth century's early sociological studies all the way to the new millennium's global perspectives. Discussion on this section focuses on Ebenezer Howard's 'Garden City', Frank Lloyd Wright's 'Broadacre City', Arturo Soria Mata's 'Linear City', Le Corbusier's 'Radiant City', Collin Rowe–Fred Koetter's 'Collage City', Saskia Sassen's 'Global City', and Jon Beaverstoc–Richard Smith–Peter Taylor's 'Alpha City'.

The second section of the paper investigates the diversion of the above Eurocentric utopias to the reality of typical emerging cities, followed by analytic critiques borrowing the theoretical perspectives of Michel Foucault's 'Heterotopias', and David Harvey's 'Opposition to Homogeny Hegemony'. Investigations in this section concludes with the introduction of 'Static City' and 'Urban Architecture' as new urban formulae that might be radical to Eurocentric norm, but are very applicable in the case of emerging cities.

KEYWORDS: Urban studies, urban planning, urban design, urban architecture, Eurocentric theories, emerging cities.

¹ Eurocentric refers to string of theories (i.e. Urban Planning) that were originally developed in Europe, based on case studies that were made in this region (i.e. European cities) that might have been practically fit in the cases of it's direct descendants (i.e. American and Australian cities) but characteristically might not been appropriate in other regions of the world (i.e. Emerging Asian and African cities).

Introduction

The traffic jam and the urban slum are two common disorders in most emerging cities. Despite the claims of 'internationality' signified by the development of their CBD's towers; it seems that the dream of adequate convenient –and more importantly affordable- public transport and social housing are still far from reality. Following the failure of decades-long numerous (technical) experimentations; there is the possibility that the real problem of emerging cities lies on its very (philosophical) foundation of planning policies.

Urban Studies and Urban Planning

As a collision point of many cultures and ethnic groups, assimilation is the main process in development of the early theories of the modern city. These theories were born from sociological inquiries, which could be traced to the nineteenth century and latterly known as Urban Studies. Themes under the subject range from community structures, communal power, and political governance (elite theories) to ethical conflicts, which were famously issued by Robert Staughton and his wife Helen Merrell Lynd, Hunter Floyd, Robert Alan Dahl, also John Rex, and Robert Moore. The issues then accumulated and led to the perfectly addressed question: 'Whose City?' (Pahl 1970).² As a country's central and local government authorities and policies gained more solid control, the trends of social studies shifted to Urban Planning.

One of the early holistic planning concepts was suggested by Ebenezer Howard with his 'Garden City Movement', demonstrating complete working-to-living-spaces coherency. By analysing town/country characters using the 'The Three Magnets'³ concept, and their social connection using the 'The Master Key'⁴ concept, Ebenezer Howard synthesized the 'Group of Slumless Smokeless Cities' planning of social city, suggesting the importance in 'regionalizing' city into one (working) central city surrounded by several (living) garden cities (Budder 1990). This social separation urban planning theory evolved among planners

² A book title which often considered as one of the first holistic publication on the theme of urban theories. It documented case study on 1960s Birmingham's housing project and formulated new urban management concepts by considering social class, race, and immigrant subdivision contexts (see Pahl, 1970).

³ This is one of Ebenezer Howard's earliest concepts for 'Garden City Movement' describing the inevitability for city centre to stop urbanization (see Buder, 1990).

⁴ Predecessor of 'The Three Magnets', this concept also developed by Ebenezer Howard to explain relationship between different citizen subdivisions that caused urbanization. This concept led to the introduction of 'Group of Slumless and Smokeless City' (see Buder, 1990).

from generation to generation and became a major mainstream of urban planning state of the art.

Frank Lloyd Wright's 'Broadacre City Movement' was one of the supporters to Garden City's suburbia development (Lloyd Wright 1932). More than just putting forward a conceptual planning, the American architect also provided a theory with the studies of an extensive model well known as the Taliesin Model, which explains the idea of the separation of the central economic city and farm-based country habitation in detail. In anticipating the population boom, Arturo Soria Mata provided a solution for the escalating population mobilization load on a daily basis from countryside to city and back through the Linear City Movement. The theory was executed on Madrid, demonstrating the development of the city's efficient linear lines, including a transport line that later evolved to the Mass Rapid Transport system.

Furthermore, the French architect Le Corbusier challenged the concept of working/living spatial separation with his Radiant City/*Ville Radieuse* Movement, which offers the planning of holistic city that will host both living and working activities in one spatial area. 'The Radiant City' was also well known as 'Anti-Manhattanism', a concept dedicated to oppose Manhattan, the most populated and prominent city at the time (Corbusier 1933). In his concept, Corbusier argued on how the Manhattanist skyscrapers are too thin in plan, resulting in above-ground spatial inefficiency. He proposes new circulation and open space optimisation schemes, which are planned for multilevel buildings by stretching typical skyscrapers sideways up to certain horizontal scale to create a 'Horizontal Tower'.

Going side-by-side with the three urban planning theories was the '1933 Athens Charter', which argues the need of 'pavilionisation' (as functional separation in the Beaux Art system) of city's three different functional zonings: *residence-work-leisure*. Systematically, the 'Radiant City' provided efficient planning strategies for the dense core *working* city; the 'Broadacre City' provided strategies for the countryside *residential-estates* and *leisure* destinations; while the 'Linear City' links the two.

Early Post-modern Critics and Urban Design

At the height of modernism critical studies, social philosophers have also played significant roles in developing the Athens Charter-based urban planning on particular citizenship focus. The poststructuralist philosopher Michel Foucault introduced the existence of *Heterotopias* (Foucault 1998), the *places and spaces* of *otherness* that did not function within the inclusive *hierarchical hegemonic system*. This heavily Kantian-Nietzschean space theory described the relationship of dual-meaning spaces such as hospitals, schools and prisons,

which are isolated and enriching the cityscape. As the mainstream theory was shifted from modern-internationalism background, critics were also flourished from its natural opposition—Neo Marxist based-critics such as David Harvey. In opposition to modern homogeny hegemony, Harvey proposes Neo-Marxist methodological geography towards (what so-called) the newborn globalised cities.

Concerning systematic focus with the advancement of post-modern philosophy, urbanist Peter Hall introduced one of the first real challenges to modernist urbanism. Together with his colleagues Cedric Price, Reyner Banham, and Peter Barker, he wrote extensive text on the evolution of hierarchical order. Greatly influenced by Carl Jung's *Collective Unconsciousness*, they introduced 'The Non-plan Masterplanning'. The visionary concept has become more contextual over time and received much support with one of the most prominent example: 'Collage City' as suggested by Collin Rowe and Fred Koetter (Rowe and Cotter 1987). Relevant to the non-linear notion of reinvigorated design practice previously known as *Collage art or painting*, 'Collage City' rejects the concept of 'Total Planning' and 'Total Design'. Reconsidering historical urban fabric, Rowe and Koetter put forward *collage* as the means of accommodating the whole range of utopian miniatures instead of forcing single hegemonic grand utopia.

In the rise of postmodernism, the centralized-hegemonic 'Urban Planning' has become non-contextual and paved the ways to the birth of 'Urban Design'. Retrospectively, the new urban practice can be defined by the Collage City perspective as being pragmatic anti-doctrinal methods, especially in the context of city's historical layers⁵. Originally, the historic fabrics were specified as city's nostalgic influxes. Progressively, the paradigm shifted further to *sub-urban revitalization*; not to the *suburban* as city's edge such as the Broadacre concept, but in a sense that the term '*sub*' refers to the smaller sector of *urban* central core mostly specified as Central Business District (CBD). In the early 1970s, the practice became famous as a generic method in regenerating a metropolis life, bringing a new vision toward *recycling the city* instead of *building a new one*. 'Urban Design' has also introduced high level specialised urbanists (instead of

⁵ On the post-modern age, Urban Design had introduced *anti-doctrinal* revitalization methods in dealings with city's historical layers. These methods involves acts of (1) *collision* or equally exposed fabrics of different time contexts, i.e. New Jewish Museum in Berlin by Daniel Libeskind, (2) *superimposition* or forwarding newer fabric in favour of the older one(s), i.e. New Louvre Masterplan by I. M. Pei, and (3) *contamination* or elemental addition to the older fabric, i.e. German Parliament House Revitalization Project by Sir Norman Foster (see Rowe and Koetter, 1987).

architects) such as Jon Jerde with numerous projects demonstrating practices much smaller than those in 'Urban Planning' but much bigger than (single-building) architecture.

City within City and City within Building

Recent urban practices have evolved, advanced, and mutated the modernist versus post-modernist dialogues, furthermore in the forms of Dispersed City, Corridor City, Edge City, Fringe City, Satellite/Ultra City, or, in the more popular jargon, Compact City. Inheriting the spirit of the 'Radiant City', the 'Compact City' is the Athens Charter's complete pavilion. It covers all spatial needs for relatively smaller but more efficient city-scale and is designed as *Walkable City* or city where everything can be reached within human walking range. It avoids the Totalitarian Planning/Design with the aim of dividing the dense single-core metropolis into some smaller new sub-systems, creating Howard's Garden City-like formation but all are within the non-suburban city range. In the cases of highly developed metropolitan CBDs, the 'Compact City' itself is often compacted even more into the size of gigantic mixed use building, making it the city within building.

Global City and Alpha City

In the early 1990s, Saskia Sassen introduced a new urban paradigm well known as the 'Global City'. In her theory, the Dutch sociologist investigated the impact of globalisation on the world's major cities, including the transnational human migration responsible for world economic restructuring. The process has actually driven transnationalism in a nation-state of origin and eventually caused denationalisation in other nation-states. Thus, global operations such as global finance and trade system would link all geographic areas into one integrated web of cities (Sassen 1991). This theory was followed by studies of hierarchy to rank the power of 'Global City'. One of the first studies was conducted by Jon Beaverstock, Richard G. Smith and Peter Taylor in 1998, which involved economic-political-and-cultural (alpha) factors with the 'alpha-beta-gamma' classification system. The result of the study was the publication of an 'Alpha Cities' list, a group of several cities that would determine fate of the rest of the world (GaWC 1999).

The Global and Alpha City studies have restarted Urban Theories on both Planning and Design, back to their sociological origin (Urban Studies), but in a whole new level of understanding. A century after the founding of elite theory, cities around the world must now be understood as one single linkage driven by an invisible natural (as opposition to elite) economic will.

False Pattern 1: Demographic Characteristic Differences

In her studies, Saskia Sassen originally determined three global cities as samples including London, New York, and Tokyo. Apart from their current superiority of Alpha Factors, retrospectively and respectively, all the three cities were also most populated patrons in the past century. In 1000 AD London was the world's largest and most populated city with more than 150 thousand citizens. In 1950 AD New York overtook London with 12 million citizens. In the new millennium Tokyo surpassed any other cities throughout the world to date with number of 30 million citizens (Hazel and Parry 2004). The Alpha City studies, however, did not echo this perspective.

In total, there are 47 alpha cities divided into four sub-categories of: 2 $\alpha++$ cities, 8 $\alpha+$ cities, 17 α cities, and 20 $\alpha-$ cities. If filtered on the basis of each city's host country GDP using World Bank's World Development Indicators, the groups can be cross-classified into regions and economic achievement classifications. The result shows how high income cities in Europe (29.79%) and Northern America (23.40%) dominate the Alpha List, followed by middle/low income Asian cities (21.28%). Returning to the association of Global City and population ranks, a study on world cities with population more than 5 million citizen conducted by Barney Cohen, showed the almost opposite result (Cohen 2003). Five decades of urban demographic sampling from 1950 to 2000 that are used to project a demographical shift to the year 2015 show how the emerging cities are aggressively taking over the ranks. The 2015 forecast concluded a trend with the complete domination of middle/low income Asian cities (46.94%), followed by Latin American (18.37%), and African (12.24%), while the Alpha List's dominators (high income Europe and Northern America) only took approximately 12% shares in total. The two cross-filtering experiments suggest that today the *much denser –thus- more complex* emerging cities, are planned and designed by patronizing their alpha plus *more simple less populated* counterparts.

False Pattern 2: Post-Imperialism History

The London-New York-Tokyo samples may also be historically understood as chronological birthplaces of urban theories. London has hosted many experiments in 'early Urban Studies and Planning', New York in 'late Urban Planning and early Urban Designs', and (recently) Tokyo in 'late Urban Designs'. On the other hand, heavily populated emerging cities such as Mumbai, Jakarta, Lagos, Sao Paulo, and Buenos Aires were founded (starting to be properly planned) during the Cold War, approximately only six decades ago. So citizen of the few decades old emerging cities never had the chance to experience the centuries-long evolution of urban living.

Most if not all emerging cities were built almost instantly by planners, who have never experienced such escalating population growth rate in their homeland. Aimed at fostering the economic growth of the newborn nation-states, the transnational donors had become an inevitable aid in developing the emerging cities. Therefore, the emerging cities would adopt Eurocentric planning's state of the art – that is Ebenezer Howard's (central) core city surrounded by several (living) garden cities in a total *homogeny hegemon(ic)* manner, becoming the *copy-cat* of London, and New York, or the other *alpha relatives*. In today's vocabulary, Mata's linearity would be transformed into massive networks of highway. At some points, this fossil fuel-based mobilisation system has crashed the citizen's rapid urbanization growth due to the government inability to provide independent (post-war international aid-free) adequate infrastructure growth. Mobility is the key problem of the emerging cities.

From an economic perspective, studies such as the *NEXT11* conducted by Goldman Sachs proven that the emerging nation-states' rapid population growth has exhibited equally fantastic economic growth. This also includes the emerging cities' ability in building Corbusian Radiants, even in the latest form of Urban Design, Compact Cities, and mixed-use building. However, the poor per capita economic distribution has made it impossible for the Radiant (*living*) Towers to be affordable for the common majority. The consequence is clear: the shift of Wright's 'Tightacre' (tight as opposition to broad) closer and closer to the city centre. The poor are invading the city.

Understanding New Heterotopias

The poor's invasion has created serious disorder in the form of settlements on critical sites such as the riverbanks, under the bridge, on the sides of railways, etc. The common solution executed to deal with this problem would be settlement relocation outside the city's border. Usually the package would also be very generous by providing the poor with government-funded affordable social housing. However, housing is not the main issue. Relocation would mean another Howard-Wright's conception. The real problem lies in the mobility cost. Almost identical to the 'Three Magnets' and the 'Master Key', the proletariat will always be attracted to the city centre to fulfil their basic primordial needs.

Losing the base of consumption pyramid in the city centre will also disrupt balance on the next level up. Low-income citizens work to serve the middle low group, providing goods such as cheap lunches for those on corporation's pyramid base, including clerks, securities, cleaners, etc.— the lowest groups that can afford the mobility cost. However, despite the air-conditioned working environment, the prestigious office's address, or suits they wear daily, most of them must travel Mata's poorly developed mobilisation lines, leaving home even

before dawn, arriving home long after dusk. The mobilisation time has consumed Eurocentric Garden City's dream of healthy living suburbia.

The low-income group who cannot afford going to the city centre but need it to survive, and the middle low who work in a modern manner but in the end of the day must return home to face its opposite truth; both are common disorders frequently undergone in the emerging cities. However, from another perspective, these facts can be understood as other urban Heterotopias, not in a functional sense, but based upon activity. It is a state of collective unconsciousness which may be far from the developed Eurocentric realities, but very much accepted in the emerging cities.

Urban Architecture: Static City and its New Frontiers

All the states of Heterotopias must be considered as complete elementary facts to arrive at the right solution. Mobility is the main issue as most densely populated emerging cities failed to provide affordable and fast mobility services. The dependency upon international aid and the issue of fossil fuel depletion make the mobility reformation even harder, if not an impossible task. Thus, the city must be deconstructed into Static City: city without mobility.

To provide the low and middle income groups with spaces, city's collages must also be deconstructed further, creating a series of reforms that not only recycle the city but also revolutionise it completely. The 'Urban Design' needs to be transformed onto more focus Urban Architecture — a building-sized architecture that is designed to create impact on the city-scale. The 'Urban Architecture' for the emerging cities is *properly designed affordable housing built on the land with no economic value* such as on riverbanks, under the bridge, on the sides of railways, and so on.

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