

Social Conflict and Urban Sustainable Development

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SOCIAL CONFLICT AND URBAN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*

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Introduction: social conflicts and the call for humanity

It is a great honor for me to deliver a speech in such important opportunity like this seminar. The topic of this seminar "Sustainable Development on Asian Mega-Cities: Issues & Ideas," I believe, is not only important for understanding our highly urbanized living environment of Asian countries in particular, but also central to development studies in general. The distinguish speakers and participants would undoubtedly be able to explore some important issues and find some enlightening ideas on how to face, handle and manage the problems related to the respective matters.

At this very important moment, however, I would like to drag your attention to the most recent terrifying experience of human live, i.e. open social conflicts and brutal global terrorism. These topics, to the best of my knowledge, conventionally hardly ever become central topics of discussion in the context of sustainable urban development. Both issues, social conflicts and terrorism, have become more interesting and important to address because of two reasons. First, within the last decade the map of social conflict has dramatically changed both in its problems and expressions. During 20th century, for example, the most significant open conflicts occurred only among nations. However, in 1990s almost all tremendous conflicts occurred within the nations. As an illustration, 95 out of 101 dangerous conflicts in the world identified between 1989 to 1996 were communal in nature in search of communal identities, neither rooted in clash of ideology nor geographical intervention.

Second, the civilian victims have incredibly multiply in numbers. In the World War I, for instance, the civilian victims accounted for 5% only. In the World War II, the number was ten times higher accouter for 50%, and in 1990s the number rose up again up to 80%. The call for humanity is now become more serious than ever before in human

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history. The critical question, then, what is the relationship between social conflicts and global terrorism with the topic of our seminar? The possible answer depends on paradigm we used in perceiving cities in general and mega-cities in Asia in particular.

Mega-cities as battle ground

Let us think about the last riots, political assassination, labor strikes, bomb blasts and other terrifying experiences. Where did they take place? In urban areas! Charles Tilly (1974) found that social conflicts tend to occur in cities. Using socio-historical research on France, he found that conflict occurred mainly in cities. However, there was no evidence of increasing conflict during periods of rapid urbanization. Instead, the incidence of urban conflict rose up during periods of nation wide mobilization and strife and fell in other times. Thus conflicts that were national in scope were fought in the cities, largely because that is where important decisions were made. Urbanization itself, however, did not generate conflict or violence.

As conflict theorists point out, social inequality and the existence of competing interest groups work to create conflicts in all societies. There are four legitimate reasons for bringing social conflicts about in cities, these are:

1. The most important political and corporate decisions are made in the cities. The conflict is usually national in nature, but the city is where they are fought out.
2. The critical mass is formed easier due to the population density of the city.
3. Relative deprivation is greater in the cities than in rural areas.
4. Costs and benefits of dissent, the risk of committing conflict is lesser than the same behavior in the rural areas.

In addition to the respective factors, the dominant interest and role of capital are two important factors that shape the social conflicts in urbanized area. The next question would be, is there something to do with sustainable development?

Sustainable urban development as a political action

As Bruntland Commission puts it, sustainable development is "... (a) development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." So that this is a conscious political action. There were two noticeable events that brought sustainability into the center of development efforts were the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio in 1992 and the Habitat II conference in Istanbul in 1995.

Although there are various and diverse policy attempt, sustainability is now become a central issue of urban development including in Asian countries. Various groups all over the world have studied ways of helping local authorities to integrate the issue of sustainability into public policies, including those related to urban development policies. Hongkong and Singapore illustrate the relationship between a city's density and its impact on air pollution from exhaust-gas emissions. They have compact center, new towns or sub-centers, a very efficient public transportation and green cuts between urbanized areas.

Jakarta and Manila on the other hand, represent the essential feature of the cities in developing countries: the massive attraction of metropolis. A population of floating peoples and ghost communities looking for jobs. As a result, a city made up slums and camps grows in the city. This is rarely subject to effective government control. Most often these urban areas receive immigrant population. Tokyo is another extreme case: a poly-nuclear metropolis shaped by a grid transport system that different from the star system.

Whatever the policies and strategies are taken, the implementation, management and maintenance are among the major concerns of local authorities are not politically free. It accountable for political process and actors. This issue is also central to all communities especially in developing countries. In architecture, sustainability related to the heritage of the past that shall pass onto future generations. It is a potential source of conflicts Fortunately "...Asian cities are perhaps beginning to invent a new urban shape consisting of the elements that make it up: brilliant skyscrapers, audacious transport structure, large parks, old urban villages, traditional block cores, and field and agriculture lying in side an exploding urbanization."

There are four dimensions of sustainable development need to be addressed politically:

1. Economic dimension: how to be competitive in the region, to attract international investments in order to satisfy the needs of its population. A good management of expenses, both long and short term.
2. Social equity : how the social equity be promoted ?

Finally, a good environment policy will impact on the city itself, but also will contribute to the overall environment evolution and that should be based on the excellent of contradictory interests in the complex mega-cities. Thank you.

August 29, 2003.

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