"The City will be Ours"

The situation of youth in urban developing process

Katharina Rabanser

AUSTRIA

Pic1: Young poor urban dwellers; Metro Manila - Philippines

1 Introduction

There is a change going on in this world. Our society is transforming in a way which will affect the future significantly. The population is growing fast, alongside that the cities are growing rapidly, the world is urbanizing. Those rapid changes are always faster than society's reactions can be which means that there are a lot of new problems to be faced. Lack of space, lack of clean water, terrible hygienic situations, lack of infrastructure and transport systems, poor livelihood opportunities are problems especially people in newly urbanized areas in the developing world have to deal with.

Most affected by bad living conditions, hygienic situation, lack of education, disasters or other threats are urban children and youth. In many cases their needs, wishes and opinions are ignored in the planning. Since they are the future users of the cities their needs and ideas should be considered as a basis for further development. A big challenge but also a big opportunity is to include young people in the planning process in order to create the best future for them.

Looking at the number of poor urban dwellers we have to admit that the situation is already escalating. There is a great need to deal with the current problems. A big part of the actions to improve the situation falls into the responsibility of developers and planners. Their challenge is to create a physical environment which provides foundations for basic standards of living.

2 The Situation and Development of Urban Poor Population

In order to understand the current state and transformation in the world's population and the situation of poor urban dwellers this chapter shows facts and trends in our society.

Results in a survey carried out in mid 2007 by the Population Reference Bureau show that the world was inhabited by approximately 6.6bn people at that time. This number is increasing constantly. By 2025 there will be about 8bn and in 2050 over 9bn people living in the world. (Population reference Bureau, 2007)

Together with the population also the cities are growing fast. Natural population growth, urban migration and changing of city boundaries cause the increasing numbers of urban dwellers. When in 1975 over 60% of the world's population lived in rural areas, (Population Reference bureau, 2007) in 2000 urban and rural population were equal and by 2030 the World Bank predicts a number of approximately 5bn urban dwellers, which will be about two thirds of the world's total population. (Baker, 2008) As shown in Fig.1 there is an unequal development between developed and developing countries. This confronts us with the challenge that the most improvement and work needs to be done in places where resources are already short. That requires a well structured developing process and cooperation between all actors.
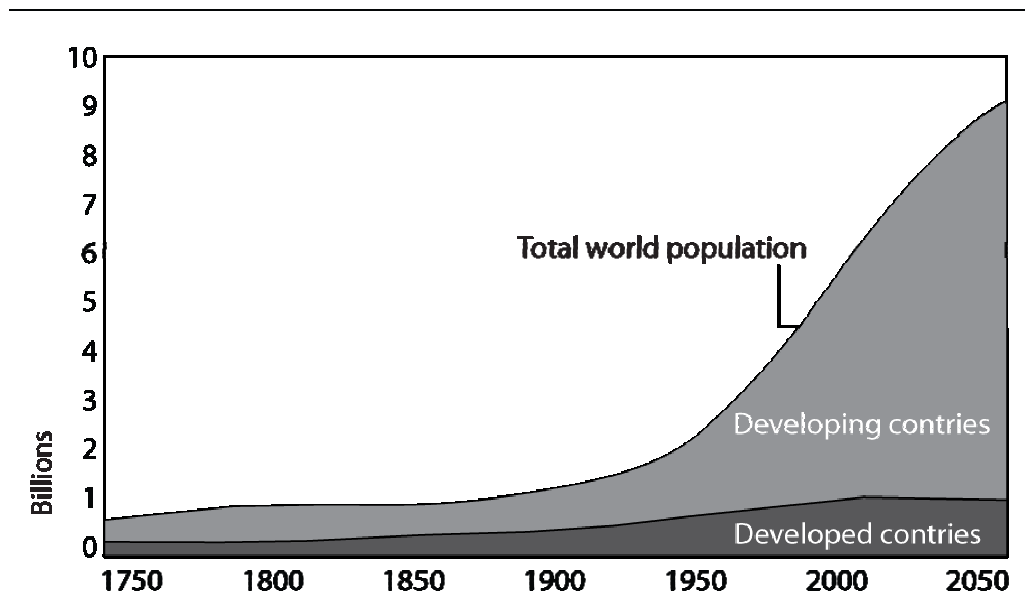

Fig.1: World Population 1750 – 2050
The World Bank, 2010

In close connection to the rapid urbanisation stands the situation and development of the urban poor population. The growth of the cities is happening so fast that the production of infrastructure cannot catch up with this quickly ongoing development and the numbers and sizes of slums are constantly increasing. Looking at a study carried out by the UN it first might look like urban slum dwellers have decreased. [Fig.2] The percentage of urban slum dwellers has globally decreased from 46.1% in 1990 to 32.7% in 2010. This is however just a theoretic number caused by changing town structures because the total number of

3

individuals has risen from 657m in 1990 to 828m in 2010. (UN, 2010) According to the World Bank in 2008 one third of the global urban population lived in slum areas.
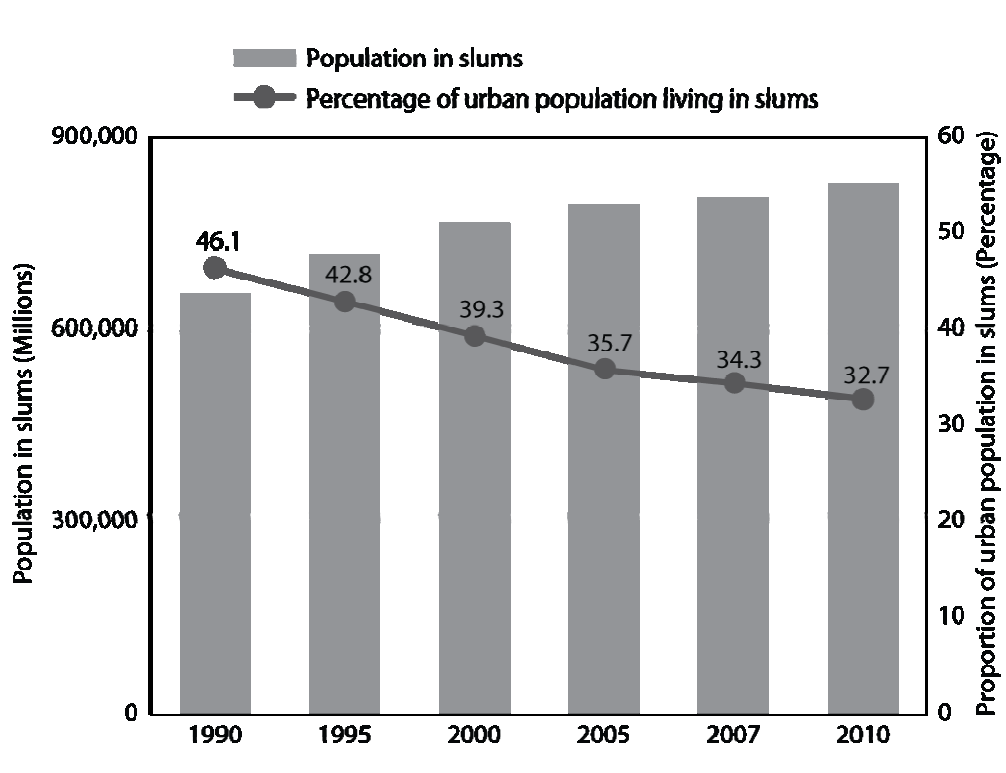
Population in slums
Percentage of urban population living in slums

Fig.2: Population living in urban slums and percentage of urban population living in slums 1990-2010
The Millennium Development Goals Report. New York, 2010

One of the Millennium Development Goals declared by the UN in 2000 targets the urban poor dwellers. (UN 2010) The ambition is to achieve significant improvement of the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. This seems very ambitious; however, looking at the Millennium Report 2010 it can be seen that this target is hard to reach since all over the world slums are growing so fast. In addition to that unexpected drawbacks like the financial crisis slow down the process of development.

3 Risks and Challenges for Young Slum Dwellers

We have to face the fact that a high number of the urban slum dwellers are children and youth. The United Nations define "youth" as the age between 15 and 24 years. Looking at tendencies in the society's structure the urban population is

younger than ever. About half of the world's urban population is younger than 25 years. (UN-Habitat, 2010) In developing countries about one third of the population is under fourteen years old. (UN-Habitat, 2006) Children and youth are the most vulnerable in society and the periods of childhood and youth influence people's lives and personal development most. Therefore children should grow up in a healthy and supportive environment which prepares them for their future life. In many places such an environment is missing.

The UN-report "State of the youth" names, after a definition by the Asian Development Bank, six types of vulnerabilities young people in urban society are most exposed to. These are issues on economic, social, health, personal, psychological and housing level. (UN-Habitat, 2010) Most of these topics are linked to the surrounding environment. Young people growing up in poor areas are much more affected than youth in functioning urban structures.

Sheridan Bartlett describes in his essay "Urban Children and the Physical Environment" talks about the vulnerability of children, their biggest risks and threats. Furthermore he explains the requirements young city dwellers have. In the first place he mentions a healthy environment, access to clean water and adequate sanitation which are fundamental to prevent diseases. Equally important is a safe neighbourhood without risks for injuries through any kind of accident. Furthermore he claims that the environment should be supportive and should encourage young people to play. In his essay Bartlett focuses on urban children but what he mentions is also valid for urban youth. A clean and safe environment which encourages to activities is important for every urban dweller. (Bartlett, 2002)

In the report "State of the Youth 2010/2011" the UN shows that many basic barriers for appropriate development are in the urban structures and built environment. (UN-Habitat, 2010) Location in the city, infrastructure on urban level such as transport or waste management and infrastructure on housing level such as access to water or electricity are the factors shaping opportunities for young urban dwellers. Without adequate facilities they will stay in a circle of poverty. Inappropriate living conditions minimize the opportunities to attend schools, lack of education causes unemployment which has great impact on the economic situation of young people and their families and prevents them from living their life in an acceptable standard.

As well as Bartlett and the UN in the book "Creating better Cities with Children and Youth" the author David Driskell describes the requirements that make a city a good place for children. He talks about safety, green spaces, meeting spaces, community identity and freedom of movement as the key issues concerning the physical environment. The characteristics which have negative effects on a child's development are conditions which can constantly be seen in existing urban slum areas: social exclusion, boredom, fear of harassment and crime, racial and ethnic tensions, threats by heavy traffic, uncollected rubbish and litter, lack of basic service, and a missing sense of political participation. (David Driskell, 2002)

Alongside the physical environment and the general situation of the neighbourhood, education is a key issue to a better life for poor urban dwellers which is missing in many places. Concerning youth education and employment recent statistics show alarming numbers. According to the UN-Habitat 57m male and 96m female young people in the world are illiterate and 70m are unemployed. (UN-Habitat, 2006) Many have neither employment nor go to school. UN-Habitat calls this the "idle youth". (UN-Habitat, 2010) Without actions to improve this situation it will get worse with increasing numbers of slum dwellers. As well as in the issue of the concrete physical environment, planners also have a part to contribute concerning this issue of education and livelihood because once again sensitive city planning leads to efficient further usage and helps projects to become successful.

As a conclusion the UN-report "State of the Youth 2010/2011" gives recommendations of how to deal with the current problems concerning young urban dwellers.

- Training youth participation in strategic city planning
- Provide youth with employable skills
- Develop good health policies
- Provide youth with access to land and safe urban space

Two of the four recommendations target directly architects and planners, namely strategic city planning and initialisation of safe urban space. This gives us a big responsibility in the development but it is also a good opportunity to help to improve the lives of the coming generations. Providing access to land and safe

urban space may flow automatically into architects' works, but there is a need to get aware of the potential, youth can contribute. Often "youth participation" seems alarming to architects because it is connected to more negotiations, a lot of work and dealing with a generation that is usually considered to be "difficult". Among all these potential complications we often forget about the opportunities of working together with young people. Architects who work in this field should be trained to cooperate with youth to see the positive effect their contribution can have.

4 The Role of Architects – Planning Cities for Youth

Looking at the current conditions we have to admit that there is a lot to do in order to improve the lives of young poor urban dwellers. The previous chapter names six types of vulnerabilities young urban dwellers are exposed to. Even though many of these issues seem to be not the responsibility of architects, the built environment has a great effect on all of the topics. Insufficient and insensitive city planning can cause negative effects on young city dwellers which will affect their whole future life. Social exclusion, health risks because of rubbish, dirty water and a lack of other basic services, boredom, risk of injuries caused by traffic, fear of harassment and crime, racial and ethnic tensions and a sense of political powerlessness must be named as negative effects of a poor city planning. (David Driskell, 2002)

   The duties and responsibilities of architects are required on different levels of city planning. First to mention are the big scale projects on urban level, secondly medium scale projects on neighbourhood level and thirdly small scale projects on housing level.

   The big scale is maybe not directly noticeable for urban dwellers so they can not contribute much from the "inside". That is why the architect's knowledge and sensitivity is specifically required. This level deals in a big part with transportation and accessibility of the whole city. Distances and bad traffic systems are a big barrier in terms of education and livelihood for urban youth and cause economical and social exclusion. (UN-Habitat, 2010) The architect's and planner's challenge is to find urban solutions which include easily accessible and affordable ways to reach the city and provide appropriate facilities. As soon as

people can access their city in a simple way they will use these new options in order to improve their lives.

On the neighbourhood level inhabitants themselves have a lot of own ideas of how to improve their surroundings. Those, who have been living in a place for a long time, know what has been working and which details can be improved. In this case youth is an important resource to get input from. The architect himself is no expert in knowing about requirements and needs by young urban dwellers. The way people from outside see the problems may be seen very different than seen from the inside by the young people themselves. But in close interaction with the young beneficiaries the architect can develop new neighbourhood and housing structures which achieve results that improve the lives of the urban youth. Especially in less educated societies people often only know what they see. Therefore it is important for the architect to use the people's needs and requirements as a foundation for his work but also to contribute new innovative solutions.

In many situations all the good intentions, ideas and innovations of architects and planners cannot be achieved and implemented. Often there are barriers and restrictions by municipalities, policies and laws, economic pressure, traditional ways of thinking or personal interests – or disinterests – of developers that hinder the chance to improve cities and areas in a city into new sustainable spaces. The architect has no chance to suggest new solutions and his job is only to draw the ideas of the decision makers who have no real insight in the importance and the backgrounds of a sustainable planning. The architect is often seen as the person providing services rather than the one creating improvement and change. That gives the architect the challenge to convince decision makers about the importance of his expertise. Sensitive planning with a long term plan on urban as well as on housing level creates sustainable cities which provide better future for young dwellers in this and coming generations.

Concluding what is said in this chapter it seems like the architect's work is made up mainly of negotiations with different parties involved in the planning process. Since that should not be an architect's task it is a great help to include a neutral party like a nongovernmental organisation to deal with those negotiations. Then the architect can focus on the tasks he is trained and skilled for.

5 Including Youth in Planning and Design of Sustainable Shelter and Neighbourhoods

In the book "Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth" David Driskell describes how to include young urban dwellers in the city planning. He talks about four different forms of participation. "Consultation" takes place when adults decide but ask children and youth what they think about a topic. "Social mobilisation" means that young people carry out projects developed by a community. "The child in charge" means that young people are the initiators and producers of an activity and they are also the ones to determine the outcome. "Shared decision-making" is a compromising solution where everyone in a community no matter what age or background has an equal vote in deciding. Driskell names the shared decision-making as the "ultimate goal". (David Driskell, 2002) It is the most realizable compromise.

The developing process of environments with youth participation has to be well planned. The start up for a project plan begins with research. Already here the youth can be included. Concerning the project context inhabitants give important inside information about local issues and trends. Their experience helps to find out about not only barriers and constraints but also potential opportunities. Formulating a precise project definition helps to focus on the aim during the whole process. Goals and expected outcomes are as important to name as the general settings, site description, key stakeholders and the role of the youth participating. (David Driskell, 2002)

Often young people are underestimated. They can contribute a lot of helpful input throughout the whole planning process. As already mentioned earlier they are an important source in research work. Based on that information the neighbourhood plan can be designed in an optimal way. The youth has own ideas about which spaces they need whether it is a quiet, well lit place to make homework or open spaces to play sports or a covered spaces to meet – independent from the weather situation.

As seen in chapter 3 unemployment and lack of education is a great problem among urban poor youth. The development process can be an opportunity to help those issues. During production and building stages youth can be empowered to

help in the construction works. Guided by professionals they not only get work during the building period but also learn skills which can help them to find jobs after the project is finished. This targets to a big part male youth since girls are often not easy to motivate for heavy physical activity. But young people who cannot do physical work can be included for example in administrative and on site monitoring tasks.

In most development projects livelihood is an issue. Today that addresses mainly adults and leaves youth behind. Also the implemented projects are often not well discussed with the inhabitants beforehand. That is why these projects are not always successful. If young dwellers are also targeted and their interests and needs are considered, there is a much higher chance for positive results. Building up projects in cooperation with them from the very beginning will put different values onto them. Youth will appreciate it more and also engage themselves more in the projects. The operation of training centres and workshops can for instance start parallel to the construction work. By the time the building process is finished the livelihood project is already well integrated into the daily life and this gives a bigger chance for a continuous success over a long time. The improved economic situation has also an impact on psychological health.

Conclusion

Poor urban dwellers are constantly getting more and younger. We have to build cities for this changing society. Best results can be achieved when the beneficiaries are part of the process. Not only is it important to include them in the planning but also use their resources in the construction and implementing of the projects.
Giving youth opportunities to express their needs strengthens them in their feeling of importance. Considering those needs as a basis for planning encourages them think about ways to improve their situation themselves. Giving them the chance to physically be part in the building process makes them appreciate their new situation. Giving opportunities for ongoing employment, education and activities will achieve improvement for their future economic, psychological and social lives. All this is a big step to break the circle of poverty and live a life they would never be able to live.

Bibliography

Publications

Baker, Judy L
2008 *Urban Poverty: A Global View.* Washington D.C.: The World Bank Group.

Bartlett Sheridan
2002 *Urban Children and the Physical Environment.* New York: City University
of New York and the International Institute for Environment and
Development, London

Ed: Department of Economic and Social Affairs
2010 *The Millennium Development Goals Report.* New York: United Nations.
ISBN 978-92-1-101218-7.

Driskell David
2002 *Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth; a manual for participation.*
Paris. ISBN 92-3-103815-X

Ed: Population Reference Bureau
2007 *World Population Data Sheet.* Washington D.C.: Population Reference Bureau.

Ed: United Nations Human Settlement Programme
2010 *State Of The Urban Youth 2010/2011; Levelling the playing field: Inequality
of youth Opportunity.* Nairobi: UN-Habitat
ISBN: 978-1-84407-696-3

Ed: United Nations Human Settlement Programme
2006 *UN-Habitat and Youth; engaging - informing - advising - connecting -
empowering - consulting – doing*. Nairobi: UN-Habitat

Web sources

http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/environ.shtm   date of source: April 18, 2011

Index of Pictures

Pic1:   Katharina Rabanser, Manila 2011