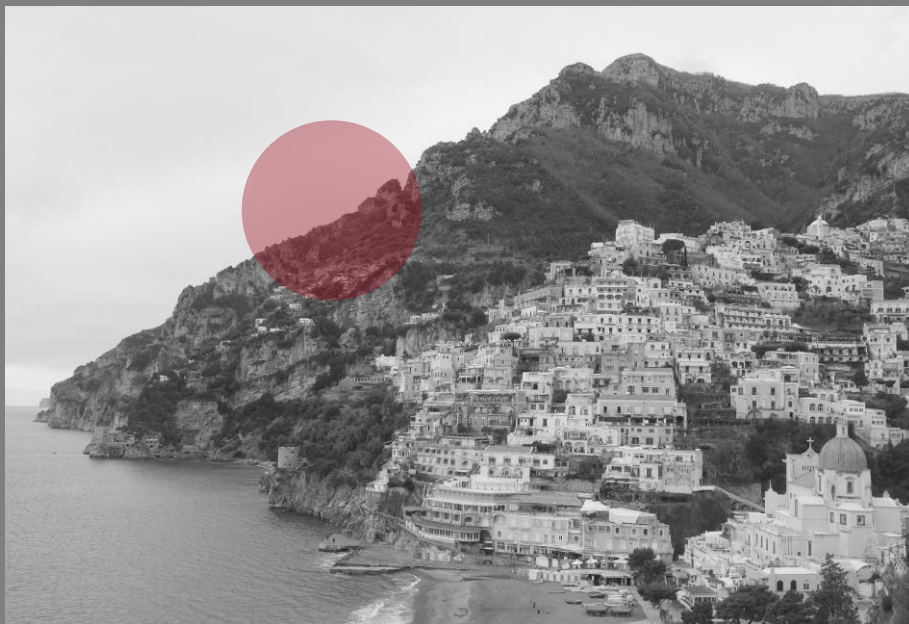




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Sustainable Development Goals, New Urban Agenda and the Urban Nexus

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List of Abbreviations

FUR	Follow Up and Review
GAP	General Assembly of Partners
HLPF	High Level Political Forum
IAEG-SDGS	Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NUA	New Urban Agenda
ODA	Official Development Assistance
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRC	Stockholm Resilience Centre
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
WBGU	German Advisory Council for Global Change

Introduction

We are at a crucial point of humanity, a historical time. “*The transformation of modernity in its existential crisis [...] and only if the most urban centres can marshal the strength for transformation, can it succeed worldwide*” (WBGU, 2016). We have a small window of opportunity to do things differently, and that is now. We, individually and collectively, can muster the courage to be bold and dare to change. Change our ways of growing, planning, building and importantly change the ways we relate to each other. This is the opportunity that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – an agreement signed by all United Nations (UN) member states in September 2015 – offers. We can ignore it, and stories of doom and gloom are materializing in front of us and exclaimed by the scientific community and enlighten leaders. Or we can cherish our ability, as human beings, to be consciously connected to humanities life-supporting systems and enjoy the benefits of working with them as opposed to against them.

In this paper, three aspects will be tackled. The first one concerns how a global process involving not only states, but also civil society, business and other actors led to the development and adoption of a universal vision of transformation in the form of the 2030 Agenda. This agenda contains both explicit and implicit implications for the transformation of urban centres. The dryness of the account of the process in this first chapter is to make sure that we have the factual understanding of the leverage points that we have, as actors in this transformation. The second section investigates how a second political process, culminating in the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, aims to contribute to a transformation in urban governance, planning and construction. And thirdly, I will argue that a forward looking systems approach in which we cooperate and coordinate our efforts reap benefits, costs less and is more efficient.

This paper is aimed as an input to the 6th Regional Workshop of Integrated Resource Management in Asian Cities: Urban Nexus, Santa Rosa, Philippines 22-23 June 2016 gathering national urban planners from different Asian and South East Asian countries. It is not an academic piece analysing the existing and near daily evolving literature but a practice orientated paper.

1 The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals

1.1 Development of the 2030 Agenda

On 25-27 September 2015, Heads of State and Government and High Representatives met at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit and adopted an ambitious sustainable development agenda entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (Resolution 70/1). This agenda will drive development for the next decade and a half. A central part of the 2030 Agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are intended to build upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs are divided into 169 targets, which are to be monitored through approximately 2030 indicators. As is outlined in the preamble of the agenda, the SDGs “*seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.*”

The process of developing the SDGs formally started at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012. It was a long and open process led by UN member states with broad participation of Major Groups¹ including local authorities. The process was far more inclusive than the process of developing the MDGs. The implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda aspire to be similarly inclusive.²

1.2 Implementation of the 2030 Agenda

As opposed to the Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals are universal - meaning that all countries need to take action to achieve them. As the implementation of the SDGs has only recently started, their impact remains to be seen and implementation is still in an explorative phase. However, the SDGs are intended to drive development cooperation until 2030. Similarly to the MDGs, they may influence Official Development Assistance (ODA), national policies and budget allocation.

An ambition of the 2030 Agenda is moreover to mobilize partnerships among all relevant actors to support implementation. Thus far, more than 2000 partnerships have registered on a dedicated platform (UN, 2016). The UN system is also examining how it can best support the implementation of the SDGs.

1.3 Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda

To track progress on the implementation of the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda outlines a multi-level follow-up and review (FUR) process at the subnational, national, regional and global

¹ Women, Children and Youth ,Indigenous Peoples, Non-Governmental Organizations, Local Authorities, Workers and Trade Unions, Business and Industry, Scientific and Technological Community, Farmers

² The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is the central platform for the review of the SDGs. The “HLPF is the most inclusive and participatory forum at the United Nations, bringing all States Members of the United Nations and States members of specialized agencies together. All people can participate in HLPF through the major groups and other stakeholders format.” <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf> accessed 16.6.16 [COMMENT CST: Hier macht Ihr es richtig und gebt das Datum an, zu dem Ihr die Website eingesehen habt. Später fehlt das. Bitte noch nachtragen.]

levels (Res. 70/1: para. 77). The follow-up and review of the SDGs is to be guided by principles including their voluntary and state –led nature, their respect for national ownership and the Agenda’s characteristics, their emphasis on means of implementation, their inclusiveness, their use of existing platforms, and their rigorous, data and evidence-based nature” (Report of the Secretary-General, 2016: para. 8).

At the global level, annual reviews of the SDGs will take place at the HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC (Res. 70/1: para. 84). Every four years, global reviews at the HLPF will occur under the auspices of the General Assembly, focusing on political guidance, emerging challenges and mobilizing action (ibid.: para. 87). The first session of the HLPF to review the SDGs took place in July 2016 under the auspices of ECOSOC.

The annual HLPF reviews will build on inputs from various sources. Firstly, the HLPF will be informed by major reports produced by the UN system and scientists, including the annual progress report on the Sustainable Development Goals and the Quadrennial Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR).

Secondly, member states are encouraged to engage in voluntary national reviews at the HLPF. The basis for these voluntary national reviews will be national reports. 22 countries volunteered to report on the SDG in the July 2016 HLPF. As these national reviews are voluntary and should respect national priorities, this gives member states considerable flexibility to decide which goals they want to focus both their implementation efforts and reporting on, at which interval they want to report and how they want to involve different actors. Germany – one of the first 22 countries to have volunteered – takes a holistic approach and will report to the HLPF in regular intervals (the next report is scheduled for 2021).

Thirdly, the HLPF will consider inputs from regional and sub-regional reviews, which can provide opportunities for peer learning (Res. 70/1: para. 80).

Fourthly, the HLPF will involve a thematic review of progress on the SDGs (ibid.: para. 85). Lastly, the HLPF will also consider inputs from stakeholder reporting on their contributions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (ibid: para. 89).

In considering all of these contributions, the HLPF is intended to build on existing structures. Thus, the HLPF will also consider inputs from existing international conventions, treaties and agreements. Similarly, institutions across the UN system will also collaborate in providing inputs for the HLPF.

Appropriate monitoring will support reporting and review at all levels. The global indicator framework for monitoring progress towards the SDGs was proposed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and discussed by the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2016. Final agreement on some indicators is still outstanding, as agreed-upon methodologies and sufficient country coverage are lacking for many indicators. Thus, the process to refine and agree on indicators remains ongoing.

1.4 The urban dimension of the SDGs

The SDGs have a strong urban dimension. Crucially, urban actors campaigned for a standalone “urban SDG”, and were eventually successful as Goal 11 of the SDGs is to **make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**. However, the urban dimension of the SDGs is much broader than SDG 11. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) has published a report showing that each of the 17 SDGs matters to local governments (UCLG 2016). German researchers have also analysed the targets of the SDGs, concluding that implementation of up to 65% of the SDG’s 169 targets would be at risk without suitable involvement of local actors (Misselwitz and Salcedo Villanueva 2016: 19). UN-Habitat has concluded that about 23% of the approximately 230 SDG indicators have a clear urban component (UN-Habitat 2016). Thus, studies taking different approaches come to different re-

sults regarding the urban relevance of the goals, targets and indicators of the SDGs. Nonetheless, they all agree on the simple fact that the urban dimension of the SDGs is broader than SDG 11.

That the SDGs would have such a strong urban dimension across all 17 goals is not surprising – in difference to the MDGs, the SDGs were explicitly formulated to create a coherent, interlinked and integrated whole rather than thematic silos. Consequently, cross-sectoral interactions are crucial for SDG integration, “to be cost-effective and efficient and reduce the risk that SDG actions will undermine one another” (Weitz, 2014: p. 38).³

1.4.1 The role of urban actors in implementing the SDGs

While the SDGs thus recognize the strong urban dimension of sustainable development, the 2030 Agenda does not specify the responsibilities of local actors in implementation. It also does not specify the framework conditions needed by local authorities and other local actors to support the implementation of the SDGs. Moreover, it is up to every member state to decide whether, how and to what extent to involve local governments in implementation.

Among urban advocates, a consensus has emerged that this urban dimension of the SDGs means that local authorities should not just be seen as implementing agencies – their challenges and opportunities in achieving the SDGs deserve special recognition. Moreover, various urban actors beyond local authorities will need to be involved as well.

1.4.2 Guidelines for localizing the SDGs

These diverse urban actors have been working to support the process of “localizing” the SDGs, i.e. ensuring that local level actors understand, engage with and have the capacities to implement and monitor the urban dimension of the SDGs. For example, the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF), which coordinates among major city networks to arrive at joint advocacy positions in international political processes has published a roadmap for localizing the SDGs that aims to support local and regional associations in understanding, implementing and monitoring the SDGs. Similarly, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) has released a guide on *Getting Started with the SDGs in Cities* that outlines tools, approaches and framework conditions for implementation.

However, a broader understanding of the relevance of national urban planners and related professions for the implementation of the SDGs is still lacking. Ideally, urban planners could support a balanced and integrated implementation of all 17 SDGs at the urban level. Such an approach could also respond to particular local concerns, for example water, and focus on that particular SDG and its link to the others.

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