



Although daunting if mismanaged, urbanisation is at the core of the economic development strategies devised by many national governments in dynamic economies – in China and India this is evident. For people, cities continue to be places of opportunity just as they have been since Mesopotamian agglomerations where thriving almost 5,000 years ago.

***“Cities continue to be places of opportunity”***

Urbanisation creates a window of opportunity that can be harnessed; but transforming challenges into a source of positive change requires innovation. This means new models to think, finance, build and manage cities.

Thus, the need for efficient innovation is not sector-specific but involves simultaneously all concerned actors - policy makers, businesses, and communities.

The capacity of the current urban planning approach to deliver a workable response to the magnitude of the urbanisation challenge is under serious question. The conventional approach to planning we have been using follows linear, rigid processes from the industrial revolution and advocates urban patterns that are based in the imagery of the modern city, and by this it is meant the architecture of the Modern Movement, circa 1920, when the car was the driver of a technology-based future. Producing the cities of tomorrow with yesterday's methods does not seem an easy or even a reasonable undertaking. Applying boilerplate plans to cities with completely different needs and institutional capacities only makes things worse – and congestion, informality and lack of services are some of the signs of sub-optimal performance.

***“The urbanisation challenge will **not** be solved without urban planning.”***

Still, (good) planning is in much need. The urbanisation challenge will not be solved without planning. A decision paralysis that lets cities grow without direction is at the heart of uncompetitive cities. But to create positive change out of the challenges that we face, the

conventional planning approach needs to be updated. The following eight points illustrate areas of opportunity towards innovation in urban planning.

***1. Being strategic by responding to real needs.***

Plans cannot be strategic if they are about glossy fabrications detached from the real issues that need to be addressed on a day to day basis. Planning proposals that lack vision are easily forgotten when political

cycles change. A plan that identifies the right issues and is designed on both long term perspective and well phased demonstration projects will create the conditions to be implemented to its full potential. Being bold and able to deliver is the mantra of cities that perform above average.

## ***2. Creating a framework, not a straitjacket.***

The conventional planning system can be complex, time consuming and expensive. In many instances it focuses rather on what cannot be done instead of generating potential. A “build it and they will come” line will most likely end in costly over-supply of housing and infrastructure where is not needed. Adopting a demand-driven approach towards a vision of the future we want can create collective momentum, and a pragmatic and modular framework can lead to implementation that makes a positive impact.

## ***3. Closing the gap between planning and execution.***

There is a speed mismatch between urban development and what the conventional planning processes can absorb. Seeking to micromanage every detail might mean decades to produce an output. When this approach is taken, plans are likely to be outdated before they are released and hence not able to solve the problems they were designed for. Thinking about implementation from the onset can help foresee hurdles early and hence enable planning to deliver outcomes in less time. The input of implementation actors in strategic stages can improve the fit between plan and execution and create efficiencies in the value chain.

## ***4. Collaborating to increase the likelihood of a positive impact.***

Manufactured goods companies never release a new product without going through a focus group. Cities that have reached out to stakeholders - community and corporations - benefit from setting priorities that reflect real needs and therefore increase the impact of the investment that would go along with a plan. If stakeholders are co-authors it is less likely that proposals will be opposed later on, reducing uncertainty. Broad support helps align a local agenda with that of other levels of government.

## ***5. Thinking systemically and acting transversally.***

The solution to complex urban challenges will not come from one mind or one sector alone. If one of the system's components is modified, there will be implications for rest. Transformative projects require holistic thinking to overcome governance bottlenecks and fragmented operations. Cities that go through system and behaviour changes to promote a policy of integration and participatory teamwork ensure that urban development frameworks, sector plans and people's needs are mutually supportive. Every successful planning case in recent decades has one thing in common: it has managed to effectively align various sectors to develop solutions tailored to end-users.

## **6. Using taxpayers' money wisely.**

Long-term costs associated with policy decisions are often overlooked, especially operation and maintenance costs which, in some cities, can be a heavy financial burden. A clear picture of urban lifecycle costs -inputs and outputs- should be a critical part of planning. Furthermore, planning should create the value that will allow recovering resources that are to be invested, at least partially. A realistic assessment will reveal how components can be best phased to balance common good and healthy accounting, and which of them will need to be funded by an external source. Evaluating results and making necessary policy adjustments would enable effective scaling up.

## **7. Creating traction through reliable conditions.**

To a city, urban planning should be a road map to its desired future. However, the absence of legal frameworks may take away the indispensable footing for plans to be implemented, hence putting a city's credibility into question. There is little point in embarking in planning processes without a sound legal framework that guarantees that what is in a plan can become a reality. Cities that have had major successes in planning also have progressive legislation that makes plans legally binding documents that can be enforced – creating reliable conditions for development.

## **8. Facilitating performance metrics.**

Not knowing why a plan has failed to deliver its expected outcomes can leave a city blindfolded for years. Disregarding indicators by which planning can be measured on an ongoing basis is turning the back on performance. Not setting targets from the beginning creates the confusion and lack of accountability that makes goals unreachable. A few, simple constantly monitored and de-politised indicators are a sign of the transparency that creates the right momentum for the right city development.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the World Bank, about 90 per cent of global urban growth would take place in developing countries. Between the years 2000 and 2030, developing countries are projected to triple their entire built-up urban areas. [www.worldbank.org/eco2](http://www.worldbank.org/eco2)

<sup>3</sup> According to Shlomo Angel et al, *Making Room for a Planet of Cities*, published by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy [http://www.lincolnst.edu/pubs/1880\\_Making-Room-for-a-Planet-of-Cities-urban-expansion](http://www.lincolnst.edu/pubs/1880_Making-Room-for-a-Planet-of-Cities-urban-expansion)

<sup>4</sup> Author's estimation