Governance Dilemmas of Sustainable Cities

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ABSTRACT

More than half of today's global population currently resides in urban areas and this figure is growing. This means that any credible call for sustainable development on a global level must involve urban areas – a fact that finds expression in the concept of sustainable cities. Governing urban areas in a sustainable manner is, however, fraught with contradictions and dilemmas. The keys to understanding these difficulties, we argue, are to be found in the interpretation of good governance and sustainability and in their inherent contradictions. For the last two decades, the *Good Governance agenda* has been based on ideas of democratic, decentralized, localized community and participatory approaches, most of which emanate from a development discourse and from experiences in rural and/or semi-rural areas. *Sustainability* is, ultimately, a global term – especially in the era of global climate change – and it may extend beyond the scope of urban government. Hence, urban areas – and in particular the emerging mega-cities that seem to be becoming an increasingly dominant sign of contemporary urban political economy – do not easily harmonize with either of these processes. On the contrary, these areas are designed to be the nexuses of various kinds of flow – rural-urban; domestic-global – and they seem ill-suited to territorial decentralization and/or participatory local democracy. Moreover, major cities, which harbour vast numbers of high-consuming inhabitants in a limited space, are typically the sites of unsustainable processes that exact a price from surrounding areas (ultimately the globe). So, major cities are often not amenable to established governance practices and they often fail to follow basic principles of sustainability. This paper aims to scrutinize the dilemmas involved in governing sustainable cities, and it offers a suggestion for how the challenge might be addressed. In addition to presenting a review of the literature, we will briefly explore some experiences gained from a number of pilot cases of sustainable cities and use these to illustrate the kind of dilemmas involved and to suggest possible solutions. Finally, we present a discussion about what may be the most appropriate future agendas for research and development agencies alike.

ACRONYMS

CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
EMA	eThekwini Municipal Area
NGO	Non Governmental-Organization
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SCP	Sustainable Cities Program
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UN	United Nations
UNCHS	United Nations Center for Human Settlements
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNHABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
WSSD	World Summit for Sustainable Development

PREFACE

The mandate of The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is to contribute to poverty alleviation and to strengthen the individual´s freedom and rights by promoting local democracy. In order to fulfil this mandate, we offer capacity building programmes through our *International Training Programmes*, decentralized cooperation through our *Municipal Exchange Programmes* and, most importantly, knowledge management through our *Centre of Knowledge*. The Centre will document key lessons learned from our ongoing activities, initiate and fund relevant research, engage in scholarly networks, organize conferences and workshops and set up a publication series.

This paper - Governance Dilemmas of 'Sustainable Cities' - constitutes the formal introduction to the publication series, which comprises three categories: *Working Papers* – high-profile research under preparation for formal publication – *Research Reports* – accounts of research conducted by ICLD's cooperating partners – and *Policy Briefs* – summaries of evidence and lessons of interest for policy-makers and decision-makers. ICLD's *Working Papers* focus upon the contemporary problems and challenges that have been identified through our research and that concern local democracy, good governance and decentralization from a development perspective.

In this first publication Professor Joakim Öjendal and Dr. Anki Dellnäs, Director of the Centre of Knowledge, introduce some of today's international challenges regarding sustainable development, good governance and urban affairs. Given the tremendous growth of mega-cities, particularly in low and middle-income countries, this paper explores how local governance may be coupled to issues of sustainability in urban areas. It also addresses the difficulties involved in synchronizing the various activities related to urban governance. Empirical evidence from China and South Africa is presented in order to illustrate a wide variety of related issues, and to encourage further research in this field.

Since the dissemination of knowledge is essential to enhancing understanding, it gives me pleasure as the Secretary General of ICLD to introduce this Working Paper No 1 and, in so doing, to launch the ICLD's publication series.

Visby, Sweden, September 2010

Birgitta Svensk
Secretary General

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Introduction[1]

This paper draws upon three academic sub-fields, namely those of *sustainable development*, *local governance*, and *urban studies*, in assessing which chasms need to be bridged in order to promote the development of sustainable cities in an era of globalization. These academic sub-fields are all well established in the literature and in research; they are of high policy relevance and very much in vogue. However, despite the explosive growth of urban areas in the South (and elsewhere) and the fact that their acute governance and democracy dilemmas are now contributing to a global sustainability crisis, academic research rarely combines insights from these different fields. In the real world, of course, mayors and municipal councils all over the world are struggling with the problem of how to encourage citizen participation in urban areas in a sustainable manner, but research on these problems tends to be compartmentalized and is therefore of limited value in supporting policy.[2]

Perhaps this is not a coincidence. These three fields – with their particular origins and traditions – are not easily combined into a single approach, coherent policy or action programme. Indeed, there are major contradictions and incompatibilities between them; 'all good things do not necessarily go together'. The impetus to develop sustainable government for major cities based on active participation by citizens who enjoy local decision-making power may be largely wishful thinking by policy makers who are driven by ideological principles that rarely work in practice: '…[the] analysis of local environmental policy remains conceptually impoverished. Research on local governance frequently understands sustainable development to be beyond the purview of "local entrepreneurialism" or simply ignores the local environmental consequences of growth altogether' (Gibbs & Jonas 2000:300; Bulkesley & Betsill 2005). Or as Atkinson (2001:278) puts it: 'One of the problems which led in the past to the under-performance/……/was that they [environmental policies] were run through central government agencies rather than local government.' The extent to which self-glorifying cities actually are 'sustainable' is subject to intense methodological debate (Tanguay et al., 2010; Satterthwaite 1997; Tonami & Mori 2007; Jarrar & Al-Zoabi 2007). There are, then, theoretical, methodological, and policy dilemmas involved in promoting as well as assessing the sustainability of cities.

However, there are examples of serious attempts to consider all three perspectives. Initiatives such as the United Nations Agenda 21 Programme, the European Union's Fifth Environmental Action Plan, and the 'Sustainable Cities Programme' (SCP) encourage local participation in creating sustainable development.[3] Furthermore, experiences from areas such as Skopje and Visakhapatnam (Sida 2009), Durban (Njokweni 2009), Dongtan (Wood 2007), Jerusalem (Jarrar & Al-Zoabi 2007) and Thailand (Tonami & Mori 2007) have all yielded interesting insights and, whether or not these have been successful, they are spearheading a shift towards more explicit urban governance that has local legitimacy and aims to contribute to global sustainability. The programmes are broad and consist of soft normative ideas, whereas the lessons developed from experience are highly visionary but not necessarily implemented (or implementable) in real cases. Gibbs and Jonas also claim that various '….local administrations have developed their own policies and strategies not only as a response to these higher level policy initiatives, but also from their own "bottom-up" perspective.' (2000:299), but they also note that these are developed more in response to local pressures than from coherent policies or theories, and this fits with more widespread critique of the weaknesses of a local governance approach. Meadowcraft observes further that practitioners of local environmental

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2   In the massive index of the annual, double-paged 'State of the World Cities 2008/9', the term 'local' does not appear at all, neither does 'sustainability', nor 'democracy'. 'Participation' has two random references and 'governance' a few more (UNHAB-ITAT 2008). 'Community', 'participation', 'urban villages', etc. are ideas that are well used, but here we are referring to 'local governance' in a more comprehensive and political sense (see below).
3   The SCP is a United Nations facility that has been created for inter-agency cooperation. It is owned by UNCHS (United Nations Center for Human Settlements) and UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programme). It works explicitly with 'local governance' and 'sustainable development' as its two key concepts (cf. UNCHS/UNEP 2000).

work have become '…increasingly concerned with the relation between global problems and local responsibilities' (1999:231), turning attention to one of the key issues in this field.

The theoretical problem that this paper addresses is that of eclecticism; can the fields of *urban studies*, *local governance* and *sustainable cities* enlighten each other in a fruitful combination? If so, how? Below we will first review the fields of Local Governance, Sustainable Development and Urban Studies respectively before we identify the critical disjuncture between these three fields. Thereafter, we will make a state-of-the-art assessment of the idea of sustainable cities, from which we will 'test' identified weaknesses and strengths on two real world cases. These cases are Durban, South Africa and Dongtan, China, respectively. Durban has been selected because it is an oft-cited case that has developed an ambitious plan of action for realizing the elusive goals of sustainability, and Dongtan has been selected because it is perhaps the most famous example in the world of attempting to build a fully sustainable city, illustrating some of the dilemmas involved in doing so. From this, we then reflect upon how one might approach this field policy-wise, and upon the agendas that emerge for research and think tanks that are concerned with this kind of governance issue (Geissel 2009).

Reviewing key debates

Local Governance – origins and key features

 The idea of enhancing the quality of local political leadership derives from the democratization efforts of 19th century Britain, although at that time these were construed as local government. The usefulness of local government was advocated by John Stuart Mill, who led the debate on how to establish representative government (Stoker 1996:5). Even at this time, participation and sovereign local knowledge were the key objectives (ibid).

The idea of *Local Governance* as an academic/policy concept is of a much later date. It is conceptually constructed from its two different parts. On the one hand, it derives from the concept of *governance*, as distinct from *government*, and this reflects the increasingly complex and multidimensional task of steering and includes a growing role of a wider set of formal institutions and public participation (World Bank 1991; Keohane & Nye 2000). In the early 1990s, the World Bank, in its explicit attempts to deliver projects and promote development, felt that government was not enough; more multi-faceted regulation systems were needed in order to back up the development efforts they initiated. According to the World Bank, governance is government plus the private and the third sectors (cf. Smith 2007:3). Hence governance also implies a degree of interdependence between government and non-state actors (World Bank 1997:110). More succinctly, governance is summed up by Bruge & Valles as consisting of perceptions of: i) distance from the traditional authority of the nation-state; ii) a 'relational administration' that builds on horizontal ties; iii) a reaction to the increasing complexity of governing, which calls for multi-stranded decision-making; and iv) the need for a local arm of government (2005:197-198). Or, in the words of Sørensen and Torfing:

> …the state still plays a key role in local, national, and transnational policy processes, but the state is to an increasing extent 'de-governmentalized' as it no longer monopolizes the governing of the general wellbeing of the population in the way that it used to.
>
> 2007:3

Hence, in this discourse, power is no longer seen as emanating from central government alone, and absolute power is not legitimate. There is, moreover, a wide variety of stakeholders who have legitimate interests and who have the capacity to legitimately engage in decision-making. Governance is multi-levelled and operates with participatory ideals. The *local* is a continuation of the same trend in political decision-making; power does not solely originate from the centre but needs to be accompanied by decision-making and institution-building closer to where people

live (Stoker 1996). The shorter distance and the smaller circles are desirable because they enhance the political legitimacy of the leaders.

Historically, following the liberal and market oriented decade of the 1980s and beginning with the 'World Development Report' 1997, the state became again the subject of and key actor in re-regulation. In contrast to the grassroots approach from the 1970s and 1980s, *local governance* became part of the good governance agenda (Smith 2007; cf. Craig & Porter 2006; Grindle 2009; Tendler 1997). As such, it includes an attempt to bring the state back in (Evans, Rushmeyer & Skocpol 1985) and reverse the hollowing out of the state in order to reduce social inequalities and stabilize market forces (which were given a sovereign position during the 1980s under the global norm of the Washington Consensus). Deepened local political participation became the inevitable route to follow in creating good governance and enhancing local service delivery and local elections. In addition, scores of incomplete democratizations in the 1990s needed substantiation and new, weak, (semi) democratic regimes needed legitimization. The *local* emerged as a way of achieving this for a relatively low political price.

By the 2000s, local governance had become a regular component of any attempt to craft good governance policies (eg. Grindle 2009), and decentralization had become a silent revolution (Campbell 2005) that was being pursued in a variety of ways throughout the third world. Hence, in addition to local elections and the crafting of local institutions, features such as participation, civic engagement and public consultations have been institutionalized in most development contexts as well as in public sector reforms. Importantly, this is not a matter of *localism* carving out a sovereign local sphere outside the state; rather, it is about trying to reconnect the state to citizens who have become alienated from it by globalization that has been delivered in the guise of democratization, and to reconnect the local level to the central one. The *quality* of the relationship between rulers and ruled has been brought into focus and political legitimacy has become key in this; the Hobbesian contract has been resurrected in a micro context and more attention is now being paid to mutual rewards for the (local) state and its citizens. In other words, the local has become a key aspect of politics and development and has to an extent become the arena in which policy reforms are grounded, development programmes are designed and high politics are legitimized.

Sustainable Development – origins and key features

The concept of *sustainable development* is always connected to the Bruntland report (1987), which coined the concept and marketed it very efficiently (Sneddon, Howarth & Norgaard 2006). The report claimed that sustainable development should be understood as: 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' Hence it constituted one of the first attempts to connect environmental sustainability to development. It drew upon the Stockholm conference of 1972, increasing awareness of the limits to growth and, of course, upon reflections prior to this (cf. Carson 1962). Its dual message might have been that there is a system crisis in the making, and that the particular crises we are observing are all part of the same phenomenon, namely overuse of global resources. The most important point may then have been that resource overuse had reached such a level that we could no longer ignore indications of system degradation; that is, global space was, by now, so interconnected and interdependent that there was no other place to which problems could be exported. Nor would postponing our problems save us from ecological disasters but would instead simply compromise the quality of life for future generations.

The impact of this report can hardly be overstated. It turned sustainable development into one of the most intensively researched and debated policy issues. It set the agenda for the first truly global environmental meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. This meeting not only made the connection between development and environmental sustainability, but it also brought environmental issues into high politics (although with mixed results), and paved the way for subsequent summit meetings, notably for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg 2002. This opened the way for global concerns about sustainability. In terms of the political

commitment of parties, the Johannesburg Declaration is a far more general statement than the Rio Declaration and it focuses more on the socioeconomic than on the environmental aspects of sustainability. The agreement focuses in particular on worldwide human conditions that pose severe threats to sustainable development. This covers mainly socio-economic issues such as: hunger, malnutrition, foreign occupation, armed conflict, illicit drug problems, organized crime, corruption, natural disasters, illicit arms trafficking, trafficking in persons, terrorism, intolerance and incitement to racial, ethnic, religious and other forms of hatred, xenophobia, and endemic, communicable and chronic diseases, in particular HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. In the meantime, major efforts have also been made to localize and substantiate environmental work that is designed to achieve global sustainability. Examples include Agenda 21, which calls for local communities to adopt sustainable practices and to raise public awareness of the urgency of the matter.

However, while this has been relatively successful policy-wise, it has been attacked by conservative critics and radical academics alike: sustainability, they claim, is impossible to define or measure and it is powerfully normative (cf. Sneddon, Howarth & Norgaard 2006). Moreover, as a global device, it suffers from 'life boat ethics' (Hardin 1968) in that it is unevenly applied and free riding prevails. Governance difficulties amass due to the fact that '…a simultaneous decrease in the power of national sovereignty, and a general turbulence in global order mean global solutions are both increasingly necessary and increasingly difficult to come by' (Sneddon, Howarth & Norgaard 2006:263-4).

To sum up, the key features of the sustainability concept are that it:
i) supports a system-wide and comprehensive perspective;
ii) promotes the politicization of the idea of sustainability;
iii) introduces the long-term time factor;
iv) emphasizes the need for action; and,
v) institutionalizes the issue of environmental sustainability.

Taken seriously, these features may be pitted against many other features of the concept that are dealt with in this paper.

Urban Studies – origins and key features

In 2008, for the first time in human history, there were as many humans living in urban areas as in rural ones. Whereas the future growth of the urban population in the developed world is expected to be modest – increasing from 900 million to 1 billion from 2005 to 2030 – the growth of the urban population in the developing world is likely to be dramatic. In the last decade, it has grown by 3 million people per week, and it is expected to more than double from 2.3 billion in 2005 to 5.3 billion in 2050 (UNHABITAT, 2008/9). Poverty is increasingly to be found in urban areas and the urban poor are among those most vulnerable to environmental degradation and inadequate planning. Or, as the UNHABITAT clearly states:

> The campaign's goal is to contribute to the eradication of poverty through improved urban governance. There is a growing international consensus that the quality of urban governance is the single most important factor for the eradication of poverty and for prosperous cities.[4]

Urban studies within the development sector have expanded their scope from mainly geographical/sociological assessments of issues of inequality and spatial rural-urban duality (eg. Haughton & Hunter 1994) to start examining the city as a key place for assessing political-economic aspects of globalization (Sassen 2006; 1998; Keil 1998; Hambleton et al. 2003); the city becomes the place in which the world's future dynamics are defined and to which

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4   http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?typeid=19&catid=369&cid=118, visited 2010-03-10.

efforts to achieve global environmental sustainability are honed. They are of particular importance in the debate on global climate change (eg. UNHABITAT 2008:130-139). As such, the city is claimed to be the arena in which a significant share of the world's environmental and poverty problems are to be solved through better urban governance (ibid.).

However, improving urban governance is a complex affair. Although participation and community work have long been part of governance in urban areas, a more comprehensive local governance approach, in which local levels are reconnected to overall decision making with power being devolved from the central authorities, has not. Megacities require different solutions than did the contexts that inspired ideas of local governance. According to the UNHABITAT (2008:228-9), there are four established models of metropolitan governance. Firstly, we have the *fragmented model*, which consists of participatory community spaces that have limited influence upon (major) decisions and often work at cross-purposes and in competition with one another (US municipalities are cited here). Secondly, we have the *mixed model*, in which local authorities are independent but coordinated. Ideally, these bring democratic qualities from the local dimension to the larger entity though in practice coordination often comes to mean vertical or even authoritarian rule from the more central level (the UNHABITAT, citing China as an example). Thirdly, we have the *centralized model*, according to which major decisions are referred to central government. This creates a top-heavy and sluggish system that is contrary to many of the progressive ideals contained in local governance (Santiago, Chile used to practice this). Fourthly, and finally, there is the *comprehensive model*, which resembles the mixed model, although tasks and mandates are more institutionally defined and assigned to the level at which they have a rational function. Local authorities maintain power over the tasks they can reasonably control but relinquish power over tasks that are better controlled at other levels. A complex pattern emerges and there are few examples of success (Abijan, Sierra Leone, has been referred to earlier).

It is sometimes claimed that major cities are ungovernable (Branschcomb 2006). Indeed, urban governance seems to be stuck in tradeoffs between democracy and participation on the one hand, and functionality and 'mega-ism' on the other. And the denser and larger the city, the less adequate the emerging governance compromises seems to become. In the emerging megacities the local becomes either ridiculously large or increasingly irrelevant.[5] More problematic, though, is the fact that although there are painfully clear statistics showing that unsustainability, governance problems and accelerating growth are most relevant in the developing world and its major cities (UNHABITAT 2009), *urban studies* have nevertheless continued to focus largely on the developed world.[6] If we are to take sustainability seriously, increased attention must be paid to the emerging megacities in the developing world and to their governance problems.

Incompatibilities aplenty – or a great synthesis in the making?

Urban local governance would seem to be an oxymoron. Urban areas – and especially emerging megacities - are far more functionally interconnected than local participatory and/or democratic efforts can deal with, particularly from the perspective of sustainable development. For instance: i) local governance, with its democratic, participatory ideals, aims to create a level of (more or less) autonomous local governments but this may conflict with the macro issues involved in attempting to achieve global sustainability (cf. Hambleton et al. 2003:5); ii) urban areas are typically major emitters and consumers that undermine sustainability processes rather than contributing to them (UNHABITAT 2009:xxii; UNHABITAT 2008:156; UNCHS/UNEP 2000:3; cf. Blassingame 1998; cf. Rees and Wackernagel 1996); iii) local governance is often designed for rural and semirural areas and here it is better able to address poverty and livelihood issues than it is in urban areas; iv) with its ideal of local decision making for

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5   We argued this above and restate it here. It does not mean that we consider community work and neighbourhood mutual assistance to be pointless. It means that local governance is inadequate as a cornerstone in political decision-making.
6   In 2009, 19 out of 20 articles published in the leading outlet, *The Journal of Urban Affairs*, were set in a developed-world context. Whereas academic research remains in the safe realm of the developed world's urban issues, policy actors such as the UN and the World Bank, pay major attention to megacity issues.

local needs, local governance fits poorly with urban areas, which are functionally integrated to the extent that their governance can only with difficulty become 'local' in major decision-making processes (cf. UNHABITAT 2008:184); v) calls for global sustainability do not directly or readily relate to both megacities and their consumption and to local decision-making; finally, vi) urban studies prefer to study urban areas in developed countries and these are not the sites at which the major issues of sustainability are emerging or where local governance must be strengthened in order to deepen democracy and fight poverty.

Many have voiced scepticism about the extent to which the sustainable city may be attained through better urban governance being performed by the local urban leadership (Bulkesley & Betsill 2005), or at all. Let us continue with a brief look into how the 'sustainable cities' idea has fared.

The State of the Art of Sustainable Cities

> In the end the question of whether sustainable cities are an oxymoron or not inevitability depends on how one defines the term. There are perhaps as many definitions of a sustainable city as there are individuals and groups attempting to attain it, and that is of fundamental importance.
>
> Blassingame 1998:9

> A Sustainable City is a city where achievements in social, economic, and physical development are made to last. A Sustainable City has a lasting supply of the natural resources on which its development depends (using them only at a level of sustainable yield). A Sustainable City maintains a lasting security from environmental hazards which may threaten development achievements (allowing only for acceptable risk).
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> UNCHS/UNEP 2000:2

> Cities are blamed for causing environmental catastrophes and for deteriorating the quality of life of the poor. The population of slum dwellers is increasing and is reaching 1 billion, caused by the failure of governments to prepare and plan ahead. At the same time cities are engines of growth and could provide opportunities for much more efficient and sustainable environmental solutions, if successful. A sustainable city must balance social, economic and environmental needs which could improve the life of the poor, provide efficient infrastructure, adequate housing, water and energy for all!
>
> Sida 2009

If one aims to be precise with words and concepts, sustainable cities is an odd concept since cities – in a Bruntlandian sense of systemic and enduring sustainability – cannot be sustainable due to their high concentration of population and limited extension. Using the ecological footprints approach, Rees and Wackernagel shows that Vancouver, Canada and London, UK require an area 180 and 120 times their physical size respectively to sustainably support their populations (1996:233-4). They conclude that:

> *…no city or urban region can achieve sustainability on its own.* Regardless of local land use and environmental policies, a prerequisite for sustainable cities is sustainable use of the global hinterland.
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> 1996:236, italics in original

From this view, sustainable cities as a concept appears to be an intentional confusion, an oxymoron, designed for

consumption in, and by, the policy community. Hence, to make sense of the concept of sustainable cities, variations of sustainability need to be applied, as in partial, local, or the ethos of sustainability (Tanguay et al., 2010; Jarrar & Al-Zoabi 2007).

Consequently, the massively exposed idea of sustainable cities in policy circles has not been utilized as much in academic research, typically being regarded as an 'impossible concept'. Moreover, commitment to sustainable policies does not necessarily (or not at all) lead to real world alterations (Patel 2006:692). So, how could and should the idea of sustainable cities be understood? How has it been pursued? Where has it established itself?

Greater attention to the notion of sustainable cities should ideally be paid in the urban governance context in developing countries (Pugh 2001; Zetter & Watson 2006; Stren 2007:56). During 2000-2030 almost all the projected aggregate growth of the world's total population will be absorbed by cities of the less developed regions. In Cambodia for instance, the rate of urban growth between 2000 to 2005 is estimated to 5.50 percent per year, which is approximately 10 to 20 times higher than in Europe (cf. Stren 2007:56). These rapid growths also take place in many other poor regions with minimal resources to meet the challenges. In much of the literature the importance of a more participatory democracy is stressed (Geissel 2009) to be able to better build and govern a sustainable city. Decentralization and the local level have also gained increasing importance for the sustainable development agenda since the 1990s. There are several organizations, such as 'Local Governments for Sustainability', 'International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives', 'United Cities and Local Governments' (UCLG) that are working to strengthen the local level. When the Local Agenda 21 was established as a worldwide action programme at the UN Conference for Environment and Development in Rio, particular importance was awarded to the local level (Geissel 2009:406; Svedin & Hägerhäll 2002). The participatory aspect is also heavily stressed in the Imagine Durban project, while the Swedish Sida initiative in Skopje is more technical in its nature (see below).

In a concerted effort, Sida has attempted to support sustainable urban development in an initiative called The Sustainable City Approach. The concept is a collaboration between representatives of the Swedish Government, Sida and the Swedish Trade Council. The concept was first presented at the WSSD summit in Johannesburg 2002 and it has then formed a starting point for further development of methods and tools for sustainable urban development in developing and transitional countries. According to Sida, 'the concept [sustainable cities] may support a city in embarking on an integrated and strategic development planning processes'. To achieve the goals a Manual for Support to Environmentally Sustainable Urban Development has been written and tested in two pilot projects in Skopje, Macedonia and Visakhapatnam, India. The manual is an attempt to document the Swedish approach to the complex urban planning process and to make it possible to handle a number of interconnecting issues and relationships relevant to sustainable community development. The manual has three main entry points; i) working procedure; ii) specific subsystems and their potential synergies; and iii) institutional factors for sustainable solutions.

One of the organizations working with Sustainable cities - The International Centre for Sustainable Cities - is an initiative which describes itself as a 'small catalytic organization that tackles the daunting challenges of urban sustainability'.[7] It was created to bring the idea of urban sustainability into practical action. The Centre was founded in 1993 as a partnership between three levels of government, the private sector and civil society organisations. The Centre is based in Vancouver, Canada and the organization operates through an initiative called the PLUS network with over 40 cities in 14 countries. The idea is to be both a think tank and a 'do tank' that delivers results through practical demonstration projects and peer learning networks and that then disseminates the lessons learnt via affiliations and high profile events. The 'Imagine Durban' project is one of the outcomes of the Centre. Let us have a closer look at this initiative.

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7   http://sustainablecities.net/, visited 2010-02-24

Durban – major visions and sophisticated participatory planning

South Africa experienced its first ever democratic election in April 1994. The challenges with urban sustainability are as evident in South Africa as in other urban areas all over the globe. Additionally, the legacy of apartheid is still present in the spatial configuration of many cities. The eThekwini Municipal Area (EMA) where Durban is located is on the eastern seaboard of South Africa in the province of Kwa Zulu Natal. The population of the area is highly diverse and mixed: 35% urban, 29% peri-urban, and 36% resides in rural areas. The African community is the largest population group, with 71%, followed by Indians 19%, Whites 8%, and Coloureds 2% (Njokweni 2009). The population in total is 3.5 million people. Also in Durban the infrastructure in the rural areas is poor and the economic activity low. In the city, on the other hand, there are problems with safety and a high crime rate. Durban, which is a category A municipality, executes all the functions of local government for a city. This is in contrast to areas that are primarily rural, where the local government is divided into district municipalities and local municipalities. In the South African Municipal Structures Act it is laid out that this type of local government is to be used for conurbations, 'centre(s) of economic activity' areas for 'which integrated development planning is desirable' and areas with 'strong interdependent social and economic linkages'.

The Imagine Durban project is built on a vision of a better and more sustainable city, where the 'key to success' is the extended participatory approach, and it is a council led project on integrated, long term planning. The project was co-funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the main purpose was to develop 'a visionary plan that can inspire citizens, NGOs, business and government to work together to make Durban the best city in the world'. During the first phase of the project, the city of Durban worked hard to fulfil the participatory visioning and strategic planning phase of its long term planning process. What should be done and who should do it were important points of departure for the process. Then all relevant stakeholders had to be identified and involved in the process. The Imagine Durban process began by asking some key questions of people from all walks of life, namely:

- What do you like about the neighbourhood in which you live?
- What do you NOT like about your neighbourhood?
- What changes would you most like to see in your neighbourhood?
- Describe your hopes and dreams for:
  a. Your neighbourhood in the future
  b. Durban in the future
- What can YOU do to make these dreams a reality?

The five questions were asked in a variety of ways – through surveys, postcards in libraries, municipal centres, restaurants and coffee shops, through high school students and via the Imagine Durban website. Also advertisements in local newspaper, on the radio and the web were used in gathering information from the inhabitants.

As the answers were analyzed, the results were categorized under various themes and strategies about how to reach the goals in the short (10 years), medium (20 years) and long (50 years) term. An action list was constructed in which all relevant stakeholders (Individuals, Civil Society, Business, Local Government and Provincial and National Government) had identified different goals to fulfil.

Action List	Individuals	Civil Society	Business	Local Government	Provincial and National Gov't
Strategy 1 A: Neighbourliness and Community Forums					
1 A. 1 Neighbours and community forums.	Get to know your neighbours and join a community forum (such as a community police forum or street committee) in your neighbour-hood.	Community forums to encourage involvement of all members of the community and create opportunities for people to get to know each other.	Provide resources to support your local community forum and initiate community events that help people to interact with their neighbours.	Develop resources for community forums and host a database of safety stakeholders' contact information. Support community events that help people to get to know their neighbours.	Develop resources for use by community forums.
1.A.2 Be alert to threats.	Be alert to possible threats to your neighbour-hood and contact authorities when necessary.	Community forums to provide information on threats and access to communication information.	Assist community forums in opening channels of communication.	Have communication channels through which threats can be reported and addressed.	Have communication channels through which threats can be reported and addressed.

Adapted from http://www.imaginedurban.org/index.php/Theme-1-Creating-a-SAFE-city.html

By using a 'Plan, Do, Share' approach, the project aims to produce demonstrable results within neighbourhoods and local government. Capacity building strategies include peer learning events, participatory government processes and community demonstration projects. As part of the 'Imagine Durban project' a theatre performance was set up and performed at different theatres in the area. The 'Imagine Durban Project' is typically described as a success story and judging from the documentation produced by the sponsors and project managers, this seems difficult to contradict. However, more empirical research is required to scrutinize the outcomes of the projects more closely.

Dongtan, China – the world's first eco-city[8]

Dongtan is an amazing idea. It was planned in 2005, conceived by the Shanghai Industrial Investment Corporation, and contracted to the British consultancy firm Arup. It was due to open by 2010 with 5,000 inhabitants (swelling to 500,000 by 2050). It is located on the Dongtan island at the mouth of the Yiangtse Kiang just outside Shanghai – Shanghai's equivalent of New York's Manhattan, as is frequently pointed out.

China is now experiencing extreme pollution and population problems. Environmental issues are bound to be of major concern for China's next generation and it was hoped that Dongtan would become a model-city at the forefront of urban planning and environmental thinking and practice.

It is designed to be a beautiful and truly sustainable city with a minimal ecological footprint. The goal

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8 http://www.wbcsd.org/Plugins/DocSearch/details.asp?DocTypeId=251&ObjectId=MTk4MTk, visited 2010-03-05.

is to use Dongtan as a template for future urban design. As China is planning to build no less than 400 new cities in the next twenty years, Dongtan's success is of crucial importance.[9]

The Guardian reported the director of the primary contractor as saying: 'It is no gimmick. It is being led at the highest levels of the Chinese government. They are very committed to developing a new paradigm of economic development.'[10] It was envisioned that it would be a green haven and that it would be fully self-sustaining in terms of emission, energy use as well as in water and energy, leaving a footprint 40% smaller than any comparable case.[11] For instance:

> Most of Dongtan's waste output will be recycled and composted. The bulk of its organic wastes will be returned to the local farmland to help assure its long-term fertility and its capacity to produce much of the city's food needs. Chongming's existing local farming and fishing communities will have significant new business opportunities at Dongtan, enhancing the island's long-term environmental sustainability at the same time.[12]

And in the same spirit:

> The project will increase bio-diversity on Chongming Island, and will create a city that runs entirely on renewable energy for its buildings, its infrastructure and its transport needs. Dongtan will recover, recycle and reuse 90% of all waste in the city, with the eventual aim of becoming a zero waste city.[13]

Dongtan has been widely cited as representing China's break with its recent history of over-using its own and the globe's resource base, and its moving into a new era; the associate director of the British design firm is quoted as having said 'China is moving from an industrial age to an ecological age'.[14]

> Dongtan is meant to set an example. It will be a pioneering eco-city that could become a template for sustainable urban development, in China itself and elsewhere in the world. It holds a promise of high-efficiency, small-footprint urban design. By 2010 Dongtan will be a model for how to build sustainable cities worldwide that could be too compelling to ignore.[15]

In addition it will be powered entirely with sustainable energy and the collective traffic will be comprehensive.[16] Thus far, Dongtan is the most explicit attempt China has made to build a truly sustainable city.

However, the idea ran into difficulties for a number of reasons and to date, construction has been extremely limited. While some reasons are circumstantial, such as the corruption trials involving some of the political advocates of the idea, others are structural in nature. Larsson, for instance, notes a key impediment to progress:

> Mostly conceived by international architects, China's eco cities were intended to be models of green urban design. But the planning was done with little awareness of how local people lived, and the much-touted projects have largely been scrapped.[17]

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9 http://www.wbcsd.org/Plugins/DocSearch/details.asp?DocTypeId=251& ObjectId=MTk4MTk, visited 2010-03-05.

10 http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2005/nov/06/china.theobserver, visited 2010-03-05.

11 http://shanghaiist.com/2008/06/24/whatever_happened_to_ dongtan.php

12 http://www.wbcsd.org/Plugins/DocSearch/details.asp?DocTypeId=251&ObjectId= MTk4MTk, visited 2010-03-05.

13 http://www.worldarchitecturenews.com/news_images/Dongtan.pdf

14 http://shanghaiist.com/2008/06/24/whatever_happened_to_dongtan.php, visited 2010-03-08.

15 http://www.wbcsd.org/Plugins/DocSearch/details.asp?DocTypeId=251&ObjectId=MTk4MTk, visited 2010-03-08.

16 http://shanghaiist.com/2008/06/24/whatever_happened_to_dongtan.php, visited 2010-03-08.

17 http://www.e360.yale.edu/content/feature.msp?id=2138, visited 2010-03-08.

It is frequently reported that Dongtan is better known internationally than locally and it does not appear to have much of a bottom-up profile. In fact, central planning is highly sensitive to hiccoughs and changes of individual leaders. There may also be a structural impediment hidden here: how can the idea of an eco-city, with its detailed planning, unusually expensive solutions, and demands for citizens to change their behaviour – in a context in which the idea has not been grounded – avoid accusations of misuse of funds and corruption? Moreover, crude economic aspects also matter: are local people interested in changing behaviour and paying *more* to live? 'Zero-emission city is pure commercial hype. You can't expect some technology to both offer you a luxurious and comfortable life, and save energy at the same time. That's just a dream.'[18] Moreover, this case suggests that we need *both* the central *and* the local to make initiatives sustainable.

At the end of the day, we are left with a (temporarily) abandoned project that has been trumpeted by progressive international consultants but shunned by local populations and feared by unconvinced politicians. Although the idea may be excellent, the price that the locals will have to pay seems to be too high, the life style alterations too demanding and the risk for politicians remains too great. The international consultants move on to the next promising idea. Let us below contrast the two cases with each other and set them against the theoretical points of departures of this paper.

Conclusions and An Emerging Agenda

One of the questions that is often raised is whether participatory governance is likely to benefit or jeopardize democracy. The failure of representative democracy to govern complex cities and to solve current problems is frequently pointed out. The idea of grassroots democracy and participatory democracy may simply represent the interests of groups with good resources and organizational strengths and may be pushed through at the expense of the common good. From this perspective, participatory governance implies a risk of pseudo-democratic elites with special interests gaining dominance (Raymond 2002:183). Also the increasing complexity of knowledge-based society is used as an argument that elected elites are and should be responsible for representing the public good and they should not be led by the uninformed masses. On the other hand, successful city management must be concerned with democratic renewal as well as with management innovation (Hambleton, 2003:147) and ideally participation transforms citizens who have hitherto pursued selfish interests into responsible citizens who are focused on the public good (Pateman 1970; Fung & Wright 2001). Many local authorities in a number of countries have also introduced various forms of area based decision making to increase the participation in planning and budgeting processes. Ward committees in South Africa are one example. The Local Agenda 21 programme was set up on the basis of participatory procedures. Local processes have no decision making authority, but can offer advice to the representative bodies with whom responsibility for making fiscal decisions rest. Within such processes, a high value is placed on incorporating marginalized groups such as youth and women (Geissel 2009:407).

The dilemma, however, is of a catch 22 nature; when urban governance is successful in mobilizing the necessary support and getting local decision-making structures in place, outcomes - in urban areas – may still fail to yield higher technical standards of governance due to the urban areas' increasingly complex and interconnected nature. Moreover, even if we accept Durban as a partial success (for now) in terms of participation, there is no evidence that sustainable development practices are being pursued or that such policies as are being pursued actually foster sustainable development on a global scale.

Let us then turn to the other case in this paper, Dongtan, whose advocates managed to construct a plan that it was hoped would become a global prototype for the building of sustainable cities. The weakness here is/was the contrived nature of the project, which was grounded only upon the political economy of foreign consultancy firms

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18   Prof Dai Xingyi, professor at Shanghai's Fudan University, taken from http://shanghaiist.com/2008/06/24/whatever_happened_to_dongtan.php, visited 2010-03-10.

and completely lacked a participatory and grounded process. Hence it was not sustainable and for the time being, it has been abandoned.

Instead, we need a locally grounded process that operates not on the basis of voluntary engagement or temporary enthusiasm but within a clear framework that is set at the national level, anchored in the legal system and developed in policy. Such a framework should in turn be in concert with international imperatives and should be outlined in research and at major conferences and UN conventions. Hence, we need to look for the quality of the local processes, and in this, three links require further attention: i) deepened local government-to-people relations in order to ground any process and establish local advocates; ii) better local government-central government relations so that the local can operate freely, but still within the limitations determined by the central state; and, iii) central government should develop a proactive stance towards global sustainability through engagement in international negotiations and standard setting.

Neither the local nor the centre can solve these sorts of problems without the support of the other. Hence, the interaction between the local and the centre is crucial and it is imperative that views are shared about who should do what and with which methods.

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