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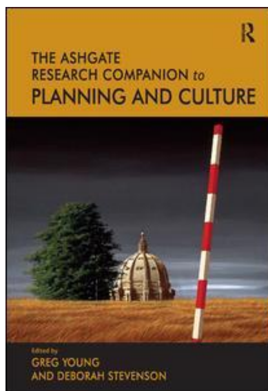

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Greg Young, Deborah Stevenson

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Development, Planning and Sustainability

Edgar Pieterse

Introduction

Key policy agendas on shelter and participatory governance are woefully inadequate to address the multi-dimensional crisis of urban life in cities of the global South. This finding was the crux of *City Futures*, a book I authored regarding mainstream development opinion on the topic (Pieterse 2008). I want to build in this chapter on that work by reacting to a number of crucial mainstream policy developments that have transpired since then and extend earlier arguments about the intersections between development, planning and sustainability (Kamal-Chaoui and Robert 2009, Suzuki et al. 2010, UN-Habitat 2011, UNEP 2011a). I will not use this chapter to critique or respond to new mainstream policy discourses but rather focus on a propositional agenda that can illuminate the intersections between development, planning and sustainability. In my work I usually try to balance critique and proposition because this is the only viable, even if difficult, mode of scholarship that makes sense amid large-scale dysfunction and exclusion (Parnell, Pieterse and Watson 2009).

The chapter proceeds via a number of illustrative diagrams and in this sense also reflects an attempt to stitch together various pieces of writing on urban development, planning and sustainability that I have been crafting over the last few years. The diagrammatic form also reveals my immersion in the world of practice through an advisory relationship with various public bodies at numerous levels: metropolitan governments, national government departments, regional development agencies and international actors in the urban development arena. Diagrammatic sketches have become an indispensable mode of communication and synthesis in trying to act as an interlocutor between scholarly debates and policy search forums.

The core argument of the chapter is: Urban sustainability requires a simultaneous transformation in four 'operating systems' of cities: 1) infrastructural, 2) economic, 3) spatial, which implicates land-use, and critically 4) political prioritization, which underpins the former three. This implies a profound interdisciplinary and heterodox cross-pollination of ideas, institutional practices and systems, informed by a dynamic conceptualization of how urban systems intersect. This alternative conceptualization is the confluence of resources and energy flows that circulate and mutate through urban

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systems and the territorial landscapes that enfold the built environment with its embodied flow dynamics. Since sustainability cannot be delinked from resource efficiency, the 'flow and form' lens (that is, resource flows and spatial form) offers a useful perspective on how the unsustainability of urban areas can be captured, argued over and potentially remade in order to achieve a much more resilient and viable urban trajectory. At the core of both urban flow and form dynamics is politics. Without a deeply nuanced and differentiated understanding of urban politics, it is impossible to open up transformative forums to take difficult decisions to adapt to or bend the trajectories of cities. However, beyond vigorous politics, one also needs an effective series of institutional mechanisms and connectors – such as growth management strategies – to translate political intent into concrete actions. All of these dimensions are in turn embedded in culturally mediated processes and institutions as the chapters in this volume attest.

Urban Sustainability

> *A 'sustainable city' enables all its citizens to meet their own needs and enhance their well-being, without degrading the natural world or the lives of other people, now or in the future. We have to ask ourselves what specific measures need to be taken to create sustainable urban habitats, and how environmental and social concerns can be brought together into one compelling win-win scenario. (Girardet 2004: 6)*

A fundamental problem with the conventional approach to sustainability is that it reinforces the teleological assumptions of mainstream development economics. In other words, it implies that there is a particular trajectory from under-development to full development that all societies need to travel along and the question is whether the pathway can be made more or less damaging to the natural environment. In reality, the policy options, constraints and dynamics of societies are much more diverse, divergent and complex (Connell 2007); and as endogenous economic approaches suggest, the critical issue is how societies can configure their own, unique and self-defined pathways to achieve locally defined social and political goals, even in an interdependent globalizing world.

In light of this critique, it is apposite to explore a process-oriented conceptual approach to sustainability. Such an alternative is provided by the National Science Foundation Workgroup on Urban Sustainability, who argue for

> *… a definition of sustainability that focuses on sustainable lives and livelihoods rather than the question of sustaining development. By 'sustainable livelihoods' we refer to processes of social and ecological reproduction situated within diverse spatial contexts. We understand processes of social and ecological reproduction to be non-linear, indeterminate, contextually specific, and attainable through multiple pathways … Within the terms of this definition, sustainability:*
>
> *• Entails necessarily flexible and ongoing processes rather than fixed and certain outcomes;*

- *Transcends the conventional dualism of urban versus rural, local versus global, and economy versus environment; and*
- *Supports the possibility of diversity, difference, and local contingency rather than the imposition of global homogeneity. (NSFWUS 2000: 7)*

This approach is compelling because it does not presuppose a particular model of modernity or economic system but also recognizes high levels of inter-dependence between contexts (or scales), which means one cannot fully escape the contemporary condition but there is also always room to work at locally specific agendas and solutions. This starting point is compatible with an open systems perspective that places economic capital in a subservient and dependent relationship to stocks of natural capital in ontological terms (Gowdy 1999). This working definition is well attuned to the scalar or relationally nested nature of urban systems. This is often missing in thinking and practice on urban sustainability. Inputs, standards, flows and design at the household scale are fundamentally different to how one thinks about sustainability at a neighbourhood, district or city-region scale. The spatialities involved are varied, irregular and seldom coincide in terms of functional geographies and unless urban sustainability thinking and interventions can be open to such spatial pluralism, it is difficult to envision the prospects of a systemic understanding of how a territory can foster more sustainable lives and livelihoods.

It is also problematic because it eschews too easily the centrality of economic development and growth for the reproduction of societies, despite the obvious benefits of the conceptual decentring of a Western imaginary of development pathways for other societies. It is absolutely vital to think through the prospects of an alternative economic model, particularly in a context where economic relations position certain economies and societies in a structurally asymmetrical relationship, that can appropriately be thought of as more durable, inclusive, respectful of non-renewable resources and connected to the meaning-making desires of people and the various communities into which they enmesh themselves. The more urgent theoretical task is to identify how one can simultaneously embrace the idea of multiple pathways to economic development while also pursuing the equally important conceptual work of figuring out alternative forms and dynamics of economic life, rooted in contemporary patterns. The economic character and functioning of urban areas must feature prominently in an enlarged understanding of sustainability, since cities and urban areas account for a disproportionate share of total economic output with the concomitant responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions. I will return to this theme later in the chapter.

The further aspect that requires a more considered treatment in the understanding of urban sustainability is the question of resource constraints. Cities depend on a number of finite resources for their economic, physical, social and ecological reproduction and for now, most of these resources are not adequately identified, understood or accounted for in conventional accounting systems. Recognizing fundamental resource limits is central to the broader goal of decoupling growth from resource use and environmental impacts. 'Decoupling means using less resources per unit of economic output and reducing the environmental impact of resources that are used or economic activities that are undertaken' (UNEP 2011b: xiii). If we consider that during the twentieth century 'the extraction of construction materials grew by a factor of 34, ores and minerals by a factor of 27, fossil fuels by a factor of 12, and biomass by a factor of 3.6' (UNEP 2011b: xiii), and

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recognize the dramatic growth in economic output with the rise of China, India and other emerging economies, the implications of decoupling become frighteningly clear. And since most of contemporary and future economic output will be anchored in cities, it is in those spaces that the broader sustainability question will have to be resolved.

The focus on resource consumption is also a useful way of opening public debates and discourses on the distributional dimensions of urban development. For example, research by Mark Swilling (2006) was able to capture the differential carbon footprint of the elite suburbs versus informal settlements on the periphery of Cape Town. Swilling demonstrates that the top earning 7 per cent of households have an average ecological footprint of 14.8 hectares per person versus 5.8 hectares per person for the next 9 per cent of households classified as upper-middle class. However, the footprint of the 15 per cent of households categorized below the breadline is only 1 hectare per person on average (Swilling 2006: 38–9).

A final dimension that should be weaved into an enlarged understanding of urban sustainability is the question of institutions. Since a transition to more sustainable resource consumption, more equitable access to resources and fairer allocation of the costs of degradation is a necessary passageway to more sustainable lives and livelihoods, it is vital to recognize that such processes require institutional embedding. Existing patterns of growth, resource distribution, consumption and regulation of behaviour are held in place by regulatory, discursive and organizational systems that live within the state but are also distributed through various networks of governance. We will be left with a limited understanding of sustainability unless the nature of urban sustainability and its transitional pathways are defined in terms of its institutional implications and imperatives. Most importantly, we need to explore and theorize how sensibilities such as 'diversity, difference and local contingency' invoked by NSFWUS (2000) can be enfolded into institutional frameworks, systems and cultures. This is a frequent silence that obscures the power dynamics at work in reproducing the status quo that is ineluctably wedded to the predominant patterns of extractive and exploitative capitalist reproduction.

In concluding this section, I will desist from offering an alternative working definition of urban sustainability but simply suggest that in this space of critique it is possible to identify and explore elements of a policy perspective that can build on the ideas of process, continuums, diversity, local contingency and situated political agreements that facilitate endogenous strategies to enhance sustainable lives and livelihoods. Instead, I now turn to my first diagram that seeks to evoke and elucidate four interdependent systems that propel the reproduction of cities.

Simultaneous Transitions[1]

Cities are restless animals that continuously need to feed off nature, ideas, culture, capital and rules – with legal force and tacit leverages – to reproduce urban life and aspiration. This embodies a variety of assemblages of 'people, resources, places, and mobilities' (Simone 2004: 14). 'This process of assembling proceeds not by a specific logic shared by the participants but rather can be seen as a recombination of contingency'

1 This section is an adaptation of an argument presented in Pieterse (2011).

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(Simone 2004: 14). Thus, amid profound fluidity, practices are deployed to stabilize a sense of order and predictability to create the conditions for 'profitable' investment and reinvestment of time, cultural capital and economic resources; processes that are part science, part intuition and equal measure emergence. This dynamic of intense indeterminacy makes simplistic delineations of discrete urban systems and patterns rather foolhardy but unfortunately also unavoidable. Whether one likes it or not, in order to figure out what is going on, and moreover potentially intervene, typologies, taxonomies and categorizations are indispensable.

It is in this reflexive spirit that I would like to suggest that an interest in understanding pathways to more sustainable urban dynamics requires one to think about three critical meta domains of urban transition that need to be pursued simultaneously. These domains are: sustainable infrastructure; the inclusive economy; and efficient spatial form, glued by processes of democratic political decision-making. Put differently, one way of thinking about cities is that they require various 'operating systems'. Figure 14.1 highlights three critical operating systems that apply for all cities: 1) infrastructural, 2) economic and 3) spatial, which implicates land use. At the regulatory heart of these operating systems live the decision-making and regulatory force of the state and/or a plurality of powerful actors that can usurp the power of the state and/or exercise partial control.

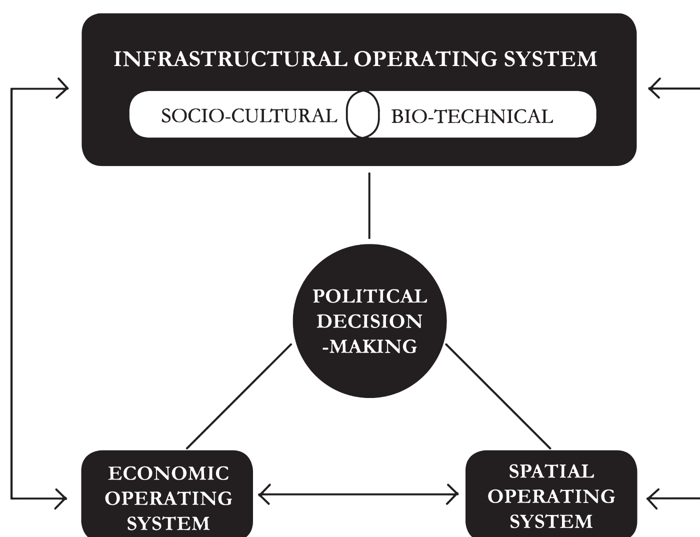

Figure 14.1 Operating systems of (sustainable) cities
Source: Author.

The infrastructural operating system can further be divided between social-cultural and bio-physical infrastructures. The latter refers to roads, transportation, information-communication technology, energy, water and sanitation, food and ecological system services that underpin the built environment and make urban life and movement

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possible in a concrete sense.[2] The concept 'flow management' provides a useful lens on how these infrastructures can be viewed as conductors of resource flows (Moss 2001). 'Central to the concept is the notion of flows of materials and energy, reusing resources or substituting non-renewable resources' (Moss 2001: 10).

Socio-cultural infrastructures refer to the social development investments that forge identity and community, for example cultural services, education, health, public space, libraries, food gardens, green spaces, housing and the arts. Social infrastructures by definition need to be tailored to local street-scale and neighbourhood-scale dynamics, which implies a substantial degree of community involvement and control in the execution and maintenance of these infrastructures (Rojas 2010). To ensure such local ownership and control it is important to ensure the capacity for local spatial literacy and purposive capacity, alongside practical community-organizing skills and dense institutions (Johnson and Wilson 2009, Narayan and Kapoor 2008, Sarkissian and Hurford with Wenman 2010). Recent experiences from some Latin American cities such as Medellín, Bogotá and Curitiba suggest that even though social infrastructures by definition need the fine-grain of community life to truly come to life, it is also equally important for it to articulate with a city-wide system of publicness and connectivity, especially in spatially and economically divided cities. Social infrastructure investments can send a powerful signal that public infrastructures for all class and cultural groups can and should be of the same quality, especially since the poorer citizens are much more reliant on them. The work of Alejandro Echeverri (2010) and his colleagues in Medellín is a particularly instructive.

Network infrastructures, on the other hand, often imply scale-dynamics that covers the larger urban system in all of its territorial expansiveness. This in turn holds profound implications for how political engagement is defined, structured and connected downward to the neighbourhood or community scale. In fact, as the work on splintering urbanism demonstrates (Graham and Marvin 2001), the lack of appropriate democratic oversight and engagement on 'invisible' network infrastructures produce conditions where city-wide infrastructures are tailored and routed to only service those sections of the population and economy that can contribute to the investment and maintenance of these systems. This is undoubtedly one of the primary drivers of large-scale service deficits across cities of the South (McFarlane 2010). I later return to these large-scale infrastructure systems in exploring how the form and flow of the city can be rethought, re-imagined and systematically remade.

The economic operating system involves production, consumption and market systems that underpin the exchange of goods and services. Importantly, these systems span formal and informal institutions and commonly involve their entanglement, especially in an era of intensifying globalization. However, one of the most challenging problems confronting cities in the South is that formal economic systems only absorb less than half of the labour force. The rest have to eke out an existence in the informal economy or completely disconnected from any gainful economic activities (UN-Habitat 2010). Those 'lucky' enough to engage in informal work have to put up with extremely low and often irregular income, which puts them in the category of the working poor (Chen 2008). In a broader context of ever deepening global integration of national economies

[2] See Stephen Graham's (2010) excellent review of contemporary debates on infrastructural imperatives, pressures and transitions.

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and value chains, it is becoming more difficult for national governments to protect jobs, provide support to the working poor and induce employment because such actions are, ironically, perceived as undermining competitiveness (UNRISD 2010). And as long as the intensifying financialization of economic value generation continues apace, it will be difficult to promote labour-absorptive and equalizing economic policies.

In the face of these powerful trends, it is essential that cities find creative ways of redefining and boosting local economies in order to broaden the base of those who are included in economic life. The urban development challenge is not just about enabling the generation of more formal economic jobs. On the contrary, the biggest and most urgent challenge is to target and absorb young adults between the ages of 15 and 29 in various categories of social and environmental public good activities that can reconnect them to society, nature and their surroundings. An example from South Africa may be apposite. Among the youth demographic, over 50 per cent cannot access formal jobs even though they may have completed primary and a portion of secondary schooling; at the same time, South Africa has the largest HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the world (The Presidency 2011). In order to contain and manage the scale of the AIDS pandemic, it is vital that a national network of home-based care workers be established. These care-economy service workers need not necessarily have a formal medical training but must work with affected households to ensure that anti-retrovirals are taken in conjunction with sufficient nutritional intake, as well as various kinds of psychological support to help sufferers and their families deal with stigma and shame. Another pertinent example relates to various kinds of labour-intensive activities to restore ecosystem services. For example, river systems and canals in developing countries are often highly degraded because of upstream pollution and downstream neglect, sometimes combined with the invasion of alien species. Restoring these vital services is an essential part of improving the overall well-being of cities and communities. If done cleverly through arts-based programming, it can also be a gateway to aid young people at risk of anti-social behaviour to reconnect in more positive and enriching ways with nature and their peers. There are literally hundreds of examples that one can dream up if this logic is pursued.

The other equally important dimension of rethinking urban economic life is the imperative to confront the challenge of raising economic growth, improving the distributive aspects of growth, and improving the environmental impacts of economic processes that generate growth; or stated in policy parlance: decarbonizing growth that is closely tied to the imperative of decoupling (Suzuki et al. 2010). This is a particularly difficult challenge for economies and cities in the global South where economic growth and labour absorption cannot keep pace with social changes (for example more women joining the labour force as education attainment improves), population growth and in-migration. The easier political response is to simply welcome any kind of growth but in the context of necessary mitigation and adaptations to deal with the impacts of climate change, much more resource efficient economies need to be promoted. Put differently, traditional notions of competitiveness and productivity will now have to be redefined to reflect the imperatives of continuous decoupling (UNEP 2011b). This implies a qualitatively different conception of urban economies, various networks and how regulatory and incentive instruments are deployed to reconstitute economic patterns and dynamics. This is more difficult in contexts of rapid population growth, large-scale poverty and a lowly skilled labour force (UNRISD 2010).

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Both the economic and infrastructure operating systems fundamentally depend on land and, more pertinently, land-use systems of cities. The patterns of infrastructural and economic distribution, flow and circulation add up to the spatial form of cities. If the spatial form is expansive, marked by sharp divisions between uses, functions and population groups, it is likely to be inefficient and exclusionary. In the vast majority of cities in the developing world, land-use systems further marginalize the urban poor and reinforce privilege for those who control land assets (UN-Habitat 2010). It is essential that land-use be rethought and designed to address the imperatives of greater urban efficiency and compaction, as well as access. Ideally, greater density through compaction should be linked with a much stronger emphasis on mixed-use land functions to facilitate greater efficiency and pluralism. A public-oriented approach as manifest in Bogotá, Curitiba and Medellín is encouraged in the recalibration of land uses, which informs a broader agenda to foster greater cultural and social integration. It is important to underscore that generalized shifts in consumption patterns cannot occur outside of new cultural norms and practices. Thus, fostering cities that can induce and sustain authentic cross-class and cross-cultural engagement around mundane everyday imperatives (Amin 2011) is key to unlocking social support and political commitment to push for structural transformation in the domains of infrastructure and the economy.

Finally, these three operating systems depend fundamentally on how power is distributed in society and mediated in (local) political institutions such as local governments (Pieterse 2008). If local governments are beholden to national government for revenue and resources, they will struggle to be responsive to local needs (Manor 2004). If local governments act unilaterally, or isolate themselves from the voice and actions of the organizations that represent slum dwellers, pavement dwellers, street traders, orphaned children, religious orders and so on, they are unlikely to recognize or understand the innovations that can only come from the effort and ownership of citizens themselves. However, even though there has been an unmistakable trend over the past two decades towards democratic decentralization across the world, there are still very few examples where participatory local governance is a vibrant reality. And recent research suggests that where innovative participatory instruments are introduced, they can become ensnared in over-bureaucratization, elite capture and so on (Fernandez 2010). This suggests that political reform and institutional retooling is a vital precursor to systemic change in the infrastructural, economic and spatial operating systems of cities. This can only be achieved, however, if informed by a radical democratic conception of urban politics.

Relational Power and Politics[3]

I will briefly rehearse in this section a broader argument to locate how to think about the nature of power and politics at the core of the patterning and interconnections between the various operating systems of the city. In conceptual terms, it is possible to delineate at least five domains of political engagement between the state, the private sector and civil society at various scales, ranging from the global and national to the local.

[3] This section is a short summary of a much more developed argument put forward in Chapter 5 of *City Futures* (Pieterse 2008).

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These are: 1) representative political forums and associated participatory mechanisms; 2) neo-corporatist political forums such as those that develop city development strategies, comprised of representative organizations – typically the government, the private sector, trade unions and community-based organizations; 3) direct action or mobilization against state policies or to advance specific political demands; 4) the politics of development practice, especially at grassroots; and 5) symbolic political contestation as expressed through discursive contestation in the public sphere. Figure 14.2 depicts these five political domains in addition to distinctions between the political and public spheres that are continuously (re)constructed through engagement in each of these five spheres and their interfaces.

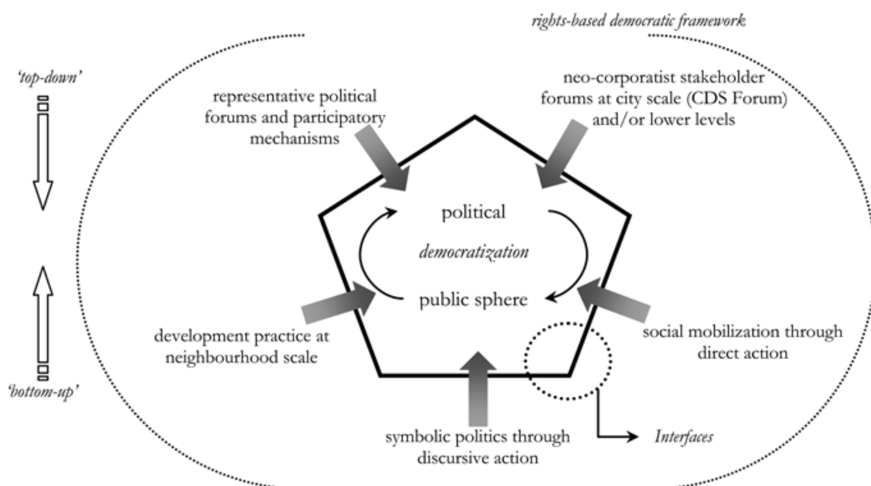

Figure 14.2 Domains of political engagement in the relational city
Source: Pieterse 2008: 89.

The value of this diagrammatic representation is that it makes visible how one can introduce a relational perspective on various moments, arenas and actors in the city. Moreover, it opens up new ground for imagining more creative progressive political strategies to undermine and subvert the oppressive functioning of dominant interests in the city. The model rests heavily on Foucault's understanding of power and therefore locates discursive and symbolic dimensions of political practice as central to re-reading political institutions and agency (Flyvbjerg 2001). I will briefly explain each domain in terms of key defining features, types of political practices, interconnections with other domains and possible pitfalls.

Political representation in domain one refers to the formal political system that characterizes national, provincial/regional and municipal government. At all levels, the main avenue of political participation in this process is through political parties that are elected. The democratic effectiveness of electoral systems depends in large measure on the democratic nature of the respective political parties along with their rootedness in their constituencies (Heller 2001). It also depends on the quality and maturity of the

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institutional rules and systems that structure the functioning of political chambers, council and committee meetings and associated mechanisms for transparency, responsiveness and accountability. It is important to appreciate that this represents a vital aspect of political focus to secure legal and policy commitments to urban sustainability measures, given the dramatic rise in national and local experiments with democratization and decentralization over the past two decades in most regions of the global South.

It is also true that the recent waves of decentralization occurred alongside the expansion of an international neoliberalization ideological project that firmly entrenched the idea that elected governments are either not the appropriate drivers of development or should undertake delivery in partnership with the private sector through public–private partnership institutional arrangements (Guarneros-Meza and Geddes 2010). These typically ideological currents coincide with the promotion of various types of stakeholder-based deliberative institutions – the second domain of urban politics – that provide a regulated and predictable space for negotiation and contestation between state, civil society and private sector representative organizations on urban issues of (mutual) concern. Commonly they are referred to as multi-stakeholder forums. In their book, *Local and Global*, Jorge Borja and Manuel Castells (1997) set out the case for the necessity of these kinds of deliberative spaces to co-create strategic plans for the city. While neo-corporatist institutional forms have been on the increase, more extra-formal political currents have also been on the ascendency.

Direct action, the third domain of urban politics, involves various forms of collective action by (disadvantaged) groups aimed at stretching the liberal democratic constitutional framework to its limit.[4] This implies that social movements and looser, issue-specific, social groups must claim their rights and entitlements through non-violent social action focused on concrete issues that shape the quality of life of their constituencies. In a sense, the primary function of progressive direct action is to maintain political momentum for redistribution and realization of human rights, especially socio-economic rights that include third generation environmental rights. Of all the political practices in the city, this type pushes most blatantly at the boundaries of the possible (in discursive, political and juridical terms). Direct action potentially shakes up the middle-class non-interest and disconnect in life beyond the suburb; that is, livelihood challenges in the slums and other spaces of marginalization. Street conflicts, clashes and destabilizations that spark off direct action are prerequisites for political agreements to address urban inequalities.

It is equally important to simultaneously recognize that the effective enrolment into citizenship does not only happen via the heroics and upper-case politics of direct action. As the work of John Scott (1997) suggests, the political terrain is much broader and more variegated than this. In most parts of the global South, the politics of development practice – the fourth domain of urban politics – unfolds at the neighbourhood scale (and beyond), where autonomous and state-dependent projects are undertaken to improve the quality of life and livelihoods, to protect against the vicissitudes of crime, violence and other shocks, and to deliberate future trajectories for the community in relation

[4] There are obviously many instances where (relatively) privileged and conservative groups also embark on direct action to get their political grievances across. By focusing on disadvantaged groups, I am merely signalling an analytical preference to highlight the actions of this category of social actors but not to create an impression that other groups do not engage in this political arena.

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to other communities and the larger regional economic-ecological system. It is vital to appreciate the *experiential* importance of participation in community-based associations aimed at improving the quality of life of oneself and fellow residents. The work of Arjun Appadurai (2004) on slum dweller associations in Mumbai argues for the importance of taking seriously 'the capacity to aspire' in thinking about this issue. Appadurai develops a layered argument that development, and especially its imagining, is deeply embedded in local cultures that people draw on to function in a day-to-day sense. Some of these cultural resources will be consistent with dominant societal values and norms that reproduce the acceptability of perverse inequalities. Other cultural resources may hold the germ of critique, of thinking about alternative social configurations that can lead to an improvement in quality of life and sense of self. The challenge is to use the future-shaping essence of development practice to expand 'the cultural map of aspirations' and in the process expand social citizenship and especially voice (Appadurai 2004: 69). It seems that the social struggles and debates that are implied with clarifying and programmatically effecting the three urban transitions offer novel opportunities for problematizing horizons of the future in the interest of excluded urban majorities.

If one accepts the Foucauldian frame that discourses mediate our engagement and sense of the world, our everyday spaces and ourselves, then we must bring the symbolic domain much more to the foreground in thinking through the nature and potentialities of urban politics. This is particularly relevant in an increasingly mediated world. Symbolic contestation through the deconstruction and reconstruction of dominant discourses on, for example, sustainability or the green economy, are prerequisites for achieving impact in terms of political strategies in all four of the other domains previously discussed. Symbolic politics functions through cultural resignification and therefore implies more creative practices that target the media, especially radio and popular newspapers; public spaces in the city, especially streetscapes and squares invested with symbolic meaning; and, spaces of collective consumption, such as schools, clinics, libraries. Symbolic contestation clears the ground to ask fundamental questions about given governmental discourses such as: What are the underlying rationalities of this discourse? What conditions make it possible for this discourse to pass as given and valid? What are the goals of the discourse? How can the elements of the discourse be challenged and re-arranged to turn the discourse on itself and make new meanings and imaginings possible that can be pursued through direct action or development practice or municipal policy? How can the futures of the city be re-imagined to reflect a radical openness as opposed to the conventional approach whereby there is only one alternative?

The drawback of any conceptual model is that it superimposes a false sense of structure on complex and fluid social realities. The relational conceptual model of urban politics developed here is no exception. Much of the dynamics leaks from the model to smudge the artificial boundaries between urban spaces and associated political practices. As Arjun Appadurai reminds us, cultural identities and practices are constitutively porous, relational and marked by dissensus within some aspirations for consensus. For these reasons, it is important to foreground the numerous spaces of interface between different types of political practice (see Edjabe and Pieterse 2010, Pieterse 2008).

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Can Planning Bring New Awareness and Action into the World?

I want to provide in the penultimate section an argument about how we can rethink the role of planning in framing and steering the three operating system transitions, premised on an understanding of relational urban politics as sketched beforehand. But, prior to discussing the institutional implications and potentialities, it is relevant to introduce a useful policy lens promoted by the World Bank in its recent policy framework entitled *Eco² Cities* (Suzuki et al. 2010). This book suggests that cities need to develop much clearer and more accurate understandings of the form and flow dynamics of the city. Form coincides with the spatial operating system discussed in Figure 14.1 above. Flow refers to the reticulation function of urban infrastructures as various resources and energy flow through the urban system to ensure mobility, nutrition, social and economic reproduction. The flow dynamics of cities are captured through various techniques that measure and quantify the resources '… extracted from nature; processed by infrastructure; consumed by home and businesses; treated by infrastructure, and finally returned for reuse or delivered back to nature as waste' (Suzuki et al. 2010: 8).

The value of the policy frame promoted in *Eco² Cities* is that it provides a useful heuristic to explore the intersections and mutual dependencies between the infrastructural and spatial operating systems discussed above. In the logic of this particular argument it goes so far as prioritizing ecological regeneration above economic competitiveness in contrast to its sister urban policy (World Bank 2009). For example, the document argues that 'City planning is firstly about protecting and regenerating irreplaceable natural capital, especially the natural assets and ecological services throughout the urban region in which the city is located' (Suzuki et al. 2010: 31). For my purposes though it is particularly useful to extract the approach to how urban form and flow inter-relate:

> *There is a fundamental relationship between a city's infrastructure systems and its urban form. Urban form and spatial development establish the location, concentration, distribution, and nature of the demand nodes for the design of infrastructure system networks. By doing so, urban form establishes the physical and economic constraints and parameters for infrastructure system designs, their capacity thresholds, and technology choices, and the economic viabilities of different options. These have tremendous implications for resource use efficiency. At the same time, infrastructure system investments (transportation, water, energy, etc.) will typically enable and induce particular spatial patterns on the basis of the market response to the investments. (Suzuki et al. 2010: 59)*

These lenses and instruments offer valuable ways of representing the infrastructural and spatial operating systems of cities. Furthermore, if read in conjunction with recent UNEP (2011a, 2011b) reports on the green economy and resource decoupling, a battery of helpful policy tools become available. But, as with all policy tools, it is essential to locate them within an understanding of power relations and structural drivers of urban inequalities and injustice. So, a next step in the argument is to explore how one can institutionalize these policy approaches but simultaneously deepen the democratization and radicalization of urban politics and decision-making.

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Much of the available literature on radical urban politics and the empowerment of the poor focuses on the importance of strong social movements that can champion the interests of marginal classes and groups. Even more literature then explores how this never happens and how even progressive-sounding regulatory frameworks and laws often only serve as foil for the further disempowerment, co-option and structural exclusion of powerless classes and groups. Much of this work is insightful and prescient but there is a great reluctance to identify how well-organized movements of the poor can effectively engage vested interests and formal institutions in the domains of representative politics and stakeholder-based forums. There is a deep-seated anxiety about political contamination if movements participate in formal processes, especially if there is a formal role for business and middle-class interests. In light of the earlier exploration of relational politics, it is obvious that social movements need to simultaneously occupy the five domains of urban politics and actively articulate both short-term and long-term demands across these spheres. This means highlighting everyday injustices, offering pragmatic solutions and drawing connections with long-term structural transformations that can offer a viable alternative to ecological, social and economic reproduction.

The core of this mode of 'radical incrementalism' is strategic savvy to deconstruct and redefine the institutional logics of the state and the market. Without developing this argument, I will explain one way of thinking differently about how best to engage multi-actor forums and processes. This brings me to the final illustrative diagram: Figure 14.3.

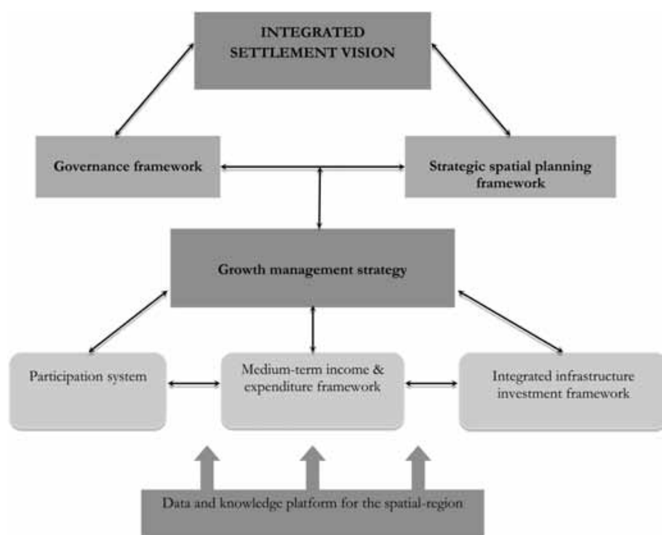

Figure 14.3 Policy and institutional dimensions of the local planning and governance systems

Source: Author.

This institutional framework is centred on the growth management strategy (GMS) for the locality or urban region. The GMS provides the baseline information about the 'state of the city' in terms of a range of development indicators, and indicates in

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what ways it falls short of the normative ideal of a sustainable city that can address the economic, social, cultural, shelter, mobility and land needs of all its citizens. Potentially, it then proposes specific ways and targets for addressing the gap between the actual state of the city and the ideal. This could provide the starting point for sectoral and multi-sectoral plans (for example, human settlement plans, integrated infrastructure investment frameworks, Local Agenda 21, local economic development strategies, or safety and security plans and so on) that guide the detailed medium-term plans and expenditure projections of the large infrastructure sectors. In other words, an infrastructure plan cannot simply define its function in terms of its own sectoral logic, but needs to demonstrate how it contributes to closing the gap between the ideal and the current unsustainable and exclusionary city.

In addition to addressing backlogs and unmet needs, these infrastructural policies and plans must also offer *arguments* about how the technological and management approaches will shape the flow management dynamics of network infrastructural systems. Put differently, infrastructure plans can offer practical and concrete illustrations of how decoupling objectives will be met through both capital and operating investments. Most importantly, to be effective in this regard, they will have to make explicit the land-use and spatial implications of future investments and pathways. The debates about the various trade-offs and pressure points that will be prioritized in these processes is exactly what the democratic essence of growth management strategies could be. If progressive civil society organizations can colonize and steer these so-called technical discourses and forums, they can go a long way to practically advance more socially just, inclusive and sustainable pathways. What is self-evident is that spatial planning and speculation can truly come into its own relevance within this institutional configuration because it can demonstrate the effects and dynamics of contemporary processes of uneven and extractive development with vibrant tools to intimate diverse alternatives and relative consequences, depending on the paths and options chosen within the polity. Admittedly, planning becomes a sly and subversive player in this landscape. This may seem less heroic compared to traditional conceptions of spatial planning, but it is bound to be far more effective.

In Conclusion

Cities are clearly at the epicentre of contemporary efforts to redefine the 'development project' in terms of so-called low carbon futures, as a slew of recent mainstream development reports suggest. In this movement there lurks a revalorization of planning as pathways and trajectories to this 'future' has to be plotted, animated and mapped. However, with the technocratic focus on resource efficiency and optimal spatial forms, the political and cultural core of cities is in danger of being lost or obscured. I have in this chapter sought to clarify how some of the recent themes and ideas in mainstream development policy frameworks on urban sustainability are indeed useful; yet, it is equally important to recast them through a radical democratic lens in order to project a viable and creative political project that can give vitality and relevance to planning. But this is planning at the core of the pragmatic agenda of urban growth management, as multiple temporalities (2030, 2050, 2100) and spatialities come into sharper view in

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our increasingly inter-dependent urban worlds. This recasts planning in a more modest key but potentially with much further reach as it hijacks the terms of reference of increasingly mainstream prescripts on sustainable urbanism. However, for this sleight of hand to work, this form of 'planning' has to be done with an acute understanding of the profoundly cultural questions that lurk at the interstices of social–technical, political–economic, community–state, state–market and natural–social dialectics that shape the fortunes and risks of cities.

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