

Impact of New World Order on Architecture and Urbanism

With special reference to Singapore (city X)

Is the emerging New World Order inevitable and does it signal the end of neo-liberalism? Over the past few decades, we have been told by lots of neo-liberal rhetoric that there is no alternative to the exploitative free market, overboard de-regulations and excessive privatised world that privilege the elite minority with incredible monetary rewards at the expense of the community-at-large. Furthermore, it must be recognised that much is rapidly changing in recent years, and even after global economic recovery, the world will not be the same again. In this lecture, I wish first to analyse six major causes and characteristics of the emerging New World Order. They are: - 1) global financial turmoil and depth of disruption; 2) new power balance and pace of change; 3) climatic crisis and sustainability; 4) new knowledge and applicability; 5) re-conceptualising globality; and 6) democracy, social justice and citizen participation. Second, I wish to identify and analyse their impact and implications on urban policies and architectural design directions. And third, to project their possible relevance to Singapore. (city X is where the lecture is being delivered)

Emerging New World Order

1) global financial turmoil and depth of disruption – The severity of the present global financial downward turmoil is unprecedented since the Great Depression in the early 20th century. Much of the basic operating assumptions of neo-liberal capitalism such as deregulations, the Washington Consensus¹ and free trade² have been challenged. The illusionary utopian culture and growth by privileging the super-rich and permitting ruthless manipulation of major financial instruments have been totally exposed. The culture of greed is now debunked. Great turbulence in commodity, food and energy prices has added more pain. Furthermore, the crisis today has seriously disrupted the export-oriented trade resulting in major job losses, particularly in many Asian emerging economies.

In the meantime, Western governments led by the United States under the leadership of President Obama are introducing huge financial supports and stimulus packages. In the process, a serious global depression is avoided. In the United States, banks and Wall Street

have now been saved from collapse. With more gentle diplomacy, the intensity of many overseas conflicts such as with Iraq, Iran, Cuba, North Korea and Myanmar have slowly lessened and will hopefully be resolved soon. Two conflicts remain challenging. They are the complex bitter Israel/Palestine dispute and the war in Afghanistan which requires deeper historical understanding and open-minded analysis of 'the War against Terror'.³ In the United States, the battles for universal affordable healthcare as well as for critical improvement in public education, physical infrastructure and green renewable energy continue unabated and the going will be tough.⁴ The public is now saving more and consuming less. Nevertheless, the road to economic recovery in the developed West will be slow and may take more time.

2) new power balance and pace of change - The current financial crisis has necessitated urgent massive response to prevent a total global economic collapse. However, the developed economies of the West and Japan are confronted with different critical problems from those of the emerging economies. Actions taken and their impacts will therefore be very different. The quick response of the Chinese government to the drastic drop in exports to the developed economies is to introduce a new development model by critically reviewing, analysing and re-defining their present strategies and by a firm commitment to unprecedented huge financial stimulus packages. Priorities will be given to renewable energy, locally based job creation, eco-urbanism and environmental sustainability as well as major infrastructure improvement in under-developed regions.⁵ These policy actions will collectively maintain high rate of growth in China, and should soon result in narrowing the rural/urban income gap as well as introducing universal health care and affordable education for all citizens.

The new development model appears able to de-link China's export dependency on the West. The projected high growth rate in China will soon eclipse Japan as the World No. 2 economy. The immense growth dividends and positive impact of infrastructural development and improvements in social, health and education services in the poorer regions as well as comprehensive anti-pollution actions are now widely recognised.⁶ The enormous benefits of this development model must have generated increasing attention to and confidence in other major emerging economies everywhere from India, Brazil and more recently, Indonesia.⁷ Since the late 90s, major new players from developing economies have already increasingly claimed their rightful voices in formulating the global agenda. This new emerging scenario will certainly hasten the global power shift. The inevitable power-sharing and cross cultural

recognition must now be accepted by the West, even if somewhat reluctantly. The entire centre-periphery structure of the present global economy will be subverted, and the world as we know it now will soon be dramatically changed. At this moment, the world is at an ideological crossroad. There are now increasingly serious debates about what is more important beyond ensuring the global economic recovery: - to safeguard the interest and profitability of global capitalism⁸ or to strive towards embracing the happiness and quality of life for all.⁹

3) climatic crisis and sustainability – After more than two decades of largely ineffective international declarations and numerous individual heroic efforts to address the escalating global climatic crisis, conditions are still deteriorating and many serious warning signs are already here. We have reached a moment of truth. Our world is now nearing the dangerous tipping points of environmental calamity, which would last for a long period of time and are difficult to arrest and reverse. Recognising the critical conditions of impending global climatic calamity, the United States has recently approved laws for comprehensive energy and global warming control. China has greatly escalated the development of renewable energy particularly wind power, and has recognised the necessity to achieve a low-sustainable carbon energy economy. However, developing countries still require decades of rapid economic growth, though they also need to minimise pollution and wasteful consumption. Fortunately, the world is now in the dynamic stage of cutting-edge technology and energy revolution. With effective applications of today's technology, there is now an abundance of available renewable energy resources. (See figure below)¹⁰ Wind energy is already competitive, and is increasingly being installed in many countries. Solar power is an incredible fuel, as it is both clean and limitless. However, solar cost is still expensive but is falling steadily. Solar power may soon be affordable particularly in countries in the sub-tropical region.¹¹

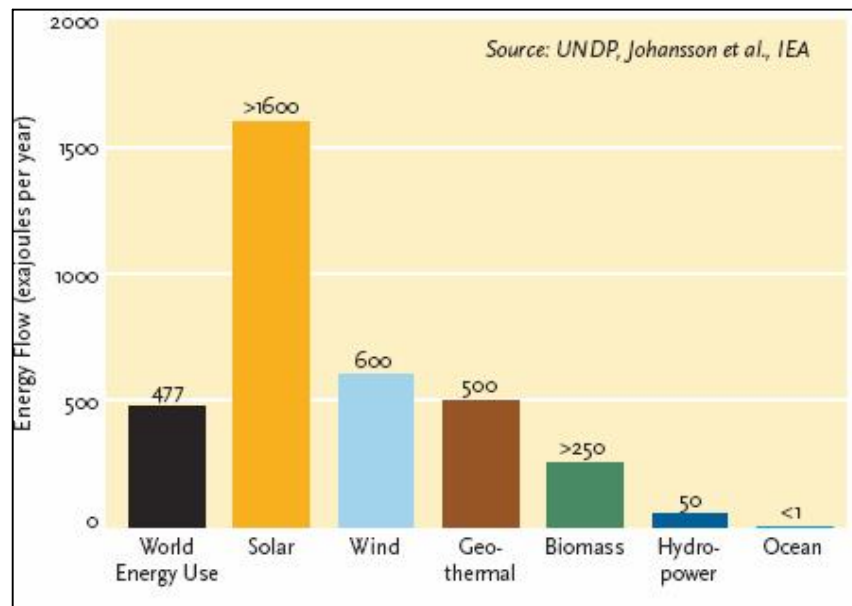


Figure shows World Energy Use in 2005 and Annual Renewable Energy Potential with Current Technologies.

To achieve a truly sustainable world is no longer just a utopian dream. The road ahead will be challenging and at least in the beginning, expensive. Major mind-set policy changes are essential to encourage creative, innovative ideas in untested territories and to overcome the current obsessions in maximising profit and efficiency of the already known. Comprehensive sustainable development requires a long-term approach and public commitment well beyond the private business practices with their other priorities and shorter-term considerations. We need clear visions and strong collective commitments in achieving a creative and vibrant living environment in the context of a harmonious equitable world for everyone.

4) new knowledge and applicability - In recent decades, the frontiers of science and technology have exploded to include cloning, stem cell research, gene therapy, nanotechnology and more. Simultaneously, there has been a clear weakening of divisions between many subject areas, particularly those in the social sciences and professional disciplines, and an increase in the scope, depth and complexity of interdisciplinary studies. Border crossing between various subjects will inevitably result in collisions of fragmented cultural elements of these various disciplines. This erosion of the boundaries between disciplines was the beginning of the explosive splintering of knowledge resulting in random dynamic directions of intellectual discourses. New knowledge is interdisciplinary, heterogeneous and flexible. It is stimulated by and responds to the dynamic changes in

contemporary values, cultures and lifestyles. Webs of connections linking multitudinous information and new knowledge are continuously being mapped and critically analysed. Driven by unprecedented speed with which knowledge accumulate and transfer in almost every sphere, traditions, cultures and values need to continuously evolve and be redefined. However, it is essential that universal rights to knowledge must ensure that all areas of new knowledge be available to and affordable by all countries particularly the developing economies.

This new knowledge has broadened our intellectual and analytical framework in the discourse and applications of modernity for each society by taking into account the local contexts and evolving from within its own cultural environment. However, different core values must inevitably result in divergent modernities.¹² Scholars are challenging the universalist idioms and basic tenets of Eurocentric modernity, particularly notions such as centre versus periphery and the technological imperative of urbanism and modern architecture, as well as postulating the notion of pluralistic co-existence between civilisations with diverse cultures and traditions. There are now strong calls everywhere to recognise and celebrate cultural rootedness not just as preservation of the past, but as the foundational anchorage of dynamic changes and in the development towards its own contemporary modernity.

In contemporary society today, the ICT revolution rapidly generates complex webs of information and connectivity between people within the country and from all corners of the globe. The rapid development of ICT together with its impact on time compression and interconnectivity has totally shattered the long-established forms and structures of work and lifestyles everywhere. One unforeseen contribution is the incredible impact of ICT on the unprecedented expansion of China's modernising capacities and the rapid rate of economic growth. Similar impact can be seen in the escalating global outsourcing of services to India and other developing economies.

5) re-conceptualising globality – Since the last two decades, globalisation has increasingly become an effective instrument of new-liberal policies by privileging the rich and powerful and polarising income disparity between and within countries. It is therefore not surprising that the concept of globalisation has encountered escalating public contention, controversy and contesting priorities. It is important to recognise that many developing countries are

worse off from globalisation particularly in the last two decades, as they are not ready to deal effectively with the complexity of globalisation and unregulated exposure to foreign investments. A self-imposed closure in key sectors of the economy will be needed to establish national capacity and sustainability. Furthermore, to eliminate hunger in the poor countries, it is necessary to adopt a national food self-sufficiency policy and stop indiscriminate conversion of agricultural land to other uses.¹³ To realise continuous high rates of growth in a capitalist-dominated system of globalisation together with broad social-oriented community objectives of justice and income equality is a tough road to travel. It is therefore most timely that the global rules are now being challenged and will soon be restructured in response to major power shift in the emerging New World Order. The incredible privileging of the huge financial sector as well as the major drug companies in the West is now being seriously contested.¹⁴ The assumed inevitability that widespread income gap between the rich and poor is essential to successful globalisation must be exposed. In all countries, the impact of globalisation needs to be carefully analysed, as its benefits are always contingent on what and in whose interest they are being implemented. We must reclaim and strengthen the positive concept of an inclusive and participatory globalisation from those who have appropriated it for their own purposes.

The concept of global cities is closely tied to globalisation. Over two decades, theorists have extensively investigated, identified and written about the characteristics and essential conditions of global cities and their inevitable painful effects of de-industrialisation, explosion of property prices and increasing income disparity in the prevalent context of neo-liberal ideological dominance. The definition of global cities in recent years has been expanded by many theorists and the media to include many national centres especially those in the emerging economies. Saskia Sassen has convincingly argued that in today's new scenario, the dynamic interaction between global and local will be fundamentally different and emerging global cities need to contain some special functions based on key components from their historical past as a basis to anchor the directions of new knowledge production in developing their specialised differences.¹⁵

6) democracy, social justice and citizen participation – With the rise of military supremacy and economic dominance, values, ideas and institutions of the West have set the universal standards and framework for the discourse and conceptualisation of human rights and

democracy. In the colonies, they were often introduced in forms rather than practices. Fairbank and Wang, noted scholars on Chinese contemporary history, are clearly sceptical about the existence of these universal values and their transferability.¹⁶ With other long established cultural traditions, the non-West is now aware that the Western concept of rights and democracy is ineffective without priorities being given to social justice and basic needs of the population at large and without serious adjustments to local peculiarities and cultural traditions. The difficult process of economic development and generating vital energy for modernisation in a society must be based on its core cultural values. For the longest time, breaking out from the age-old poverty trap in the developing world was only an illusionary utopian dream. The critical challenges in these countries are to meet the basic needs for a large proportion of the population. These needs include freedom from hunger and acute poverty as well as basic shelter, education, health-care and clean air and water. With major power-shift and re-structuring of development priority in the emerging New World Order, conditions are now ready to achieve these ambitious global objectives for all mankind. However, each country must bear responsibility to maximise improvement in the quality of life for all citizens as the key guiding value beyond the objective of wealth creation for the rich and powerful. To champion global justice for everyone within the ecological sustainability perspective requires a fundamental re-orientation and great vision towards the strategy of people-oriented development.

Citizen participation and protest against injustice are occurring more frequently everywhere, irrespective of different political systems and tight media control by national states. Since the mid-90s, China has recorded tens of thousands of protests annually against evictions of farmers and urban residents, and increasingly against mistreatment of citizens by government officials and employers. More recently, violent protest actions and even rioting have taken place against appalling working conditions and horrific environmental pollution.¹⁷ In countries where mass media are government controlled, such as China and Malaysia, ICT has provided an effective instrument for alternative and dissenting voices as well as more political space for public debates and grass-root participation. ICT also provides an essential platform for activists to act local and to network global. However, Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and activists alone cannot change the world without the conceptual understanding and commitment by the intellectual community and political movement.

Nonetheless, we must now work together to hasten the exciting dramatic changes for a more humane and just world for everyone.

Impact on Architecture and Urbanism

In the second part of this lecture, I will attempt to identify and analyse the multi-faceted impact of the emerging New World Order and their key implications on urban policies and architectural design directions. They are :- 1) spatial justice and participation; 2) re-defining global cities; 3); urban explosion and the poor 4) sustainability and affordability; 5) urban visions and public spaces; 6) incomplete urbanism; and 7) architecture, urbanism and contemporariness. I must emphasise that this is not a one-size-fit-all comprehensive analysis. Some issues need to be modified, expanded and updated, while new issues may be identified and added particularly arising from the specific case-studies of different cities.

1) spatial justice and participation – Neo-liberal politics in the last two decades has greatly accelerated disparity in investment among cities in favour of the financially competitive as well as enforce the distinct pattern of geographic discrimination within cities such as slums and squatter settlements. We need to challenge the long accepted treatment and allocation of urban space as unproblematic and ideologically neutral. We must now recognise that space allocation has far-reaching impact on social and cultural well-being and economic opportunities. A progressive city is a social and spatial conflict zone with different interest groups contesting and negotiating through constant transformation. Any form of citizen participation is a form of conflict. In order to participate effectively, one needs to understand the complexity of the problems and to identify the forces of conflict that act upon that environment.

‘The right to the city’ is one of Lefebvre’s core concepts¹⁸ and is now a global battle cry in the struggle against all sorts of social injustices. Historically, the rich and powerful have always created spatial arrangements most favourable for themselves. The effective implementation of urban spatial justice is clearly a difficult task, as it is necessary to re-examine and challenge many long established planning theories and practices. To achieve spatial justice for citizens, those vested with power to produce the physical spaces must listen seriously to the grassroots and to critical alternative voices arising from active citizen

participation. Spatial justice is a mirror reflecting the complex true image of those in power. It is in this context that many urban actions should be scrutinised for their effective implementation in response to the emerging New World Order and the rightful demands of the citizenry.

2) re-defining global cities – Currently, New York, London and Tokyo are widely acknowledged as primate global cities because they are the global financial hubs.¹⁹ There are several important factors now that have major impact on the evolving characteristic of global cities. Firstly, the financial sector will now be more regulated and less privileged. These changes towards a more productive, responsible and sustainable financial sector will certainly result in lower demand for the high cost facilities such as offices and restaurants in the core central areas of these cities.

Secondly, major global cities will soon be recognised in emerging economies such as Shanghai and Mumbai to share the primacy of globality with New York, London and Tokyo. However, these new global cities must give priority to serving their complex challenging national needs as well as to meeting the expectation of the majority in the improvement of their quality of life.

Thirdly, I agree with Edward Soja's emphatic argument that global city regions are not just a new twist on the prevalent concept of global cities. Global city regions must be fully integrated with their large surrounding areas to form global city regions with polycentric complementary development.²⁰ Global city regions can bridge the harmful dichotomy between global and local, can act as the counter-force against the downward spiral of income disparity, can moderate property prices to affordable level for the majority, and can provide appropriate conditions for new employment opportunities. For over a decade, China has been aggressively planning urban development on a large regional scale, generally in line with Soja's concept of 'global city regions'. Three locations are identified. They are the Yangze River (Shanghai) delta, Beijing-Tianjin corridor and the Pearl River (Hong Kong-Guangzhou) delta.

Lastly, in the New World Order, it is no longer essential for emerging global cities to perform as peripheral supports to global capitalism. Instead, each emerging global city needs to make

an effective contribution towards various global functions and new knowledge, by containing some special elements based on key components from their historical past. An excellent example is the possibility for Singapore with its multi-ethnic population to use its traditional expertise in entrepot trade as a basis to develop its unique capability.²¹ However, it is important to realise that population size is not an essential criteria and an over-extended global ambition can be counter-productive.

3) urban explosion and the poor – The size and velocity of urbanisation today in developing countries are historically unprecedented. Cities of the four tiger economies (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) and the coastal region in China have generated substantial job opportunities for millions of incoming exodus from surplus rural labour. With better financial support from the central governments, many megacities in developing countries such as Mumbai and Jakarta still appear liveable and manageable. In the meantime, substantial urbanisation in preserving the surrounding nature and agricultural land are often sacrificed for short-term gain and even for the benefit of the rich and powerful. Furthermore, rural poverty still remains the main cause for mass rural-urban migration. In the coming years, tremendous projected urban population growth is likely to occur in major cities in less developed regions and the second-tier cities. Substantial human and financial resources are urgently needed to ensure their liveability. Decentralised financial allocations to responsible local authorities with participatory approach as in Indonesia in recent years may provide a possible effective solution. A good example is the recent successful transformation of Solo (also known as Surakarta) in Central Java.²² More serious search for alternatives in improving rural living environment and quality of life must be examined, such as the idealistic radical proposal of Tay's 'Rubanisation'.²³

With few exceptions, most cities in developing countries are overwhelmed by massive population explosion, with many inner city and peripheral slums approaching or even exceeding half the total population.²⁴ Furthermore, the almost universal refusals to provide even basic facilities, minimum legal entitlement and other supporting social services for the slum residents are symbolic attitudes of the elitist-oriented authorities. In the name of modernisation and development, the present scale of forcible evictions of urban poor and farmers are immense and escalating.²⁵ We are fast approaching a major urban catastrophe in these cities, unless the urban poor and farmers can unite and successfully challenge the

imposed conditions of their terminal marginality and claim their rightful share of development benefits as citizens. Tenancy rights for slum residents and farmers must be given top priority by national governments and this issue should be placed on CSOs and international agenda of human rights and social justice.

4) sustainability and affordability – In the global perspective, population stabilisation is one critical issue which requires urgent collective action. All efforts must therefore be made and prejudices put aside in order to achieve this in the shortest possible time. In the meantime, urban population in developing countries is projected to explode exponentially beyond four billion by about 2030. Much has already been written about urban sustainability from low-energy transport, green buildings and retrofitting of existing buildings to urban agriculture and various mode of recycling.²⁶ New knowledge and theories are continuously being introduced such as the integrated eco-friendly design approach by Ken Yeang²⁷ and eco-effectiveness in recycling when systems are designed with self-regenerating capabilities.²⁸ Presently, many governments have adopted sustainable development as a slogan to attract and provide new investment opportunity without moral principles. It is important for us to ask the challenging question: - sustainable environment for whom – who benefits and who loses?

To provide the basic needs and amenities for the whole community, particularly the poor in developing countries, it is essential to expand the concept of citizen rights, spatial justice and affordability. To eliminate poverty, improve quality of life for the majority and decrease income gap must be central to our deliberations on sustainability. Affordability particularly for the poor, the handicapped and the sick as well as the young and elderly, is a crucial moral issue for all countries. Public transport and health care, as well as parks/recreational facilities and entertainment/cultural activities should be made affordable for all citizens. However, there is no one-size-fit-all formula and each nation will have to find the most effective way how this can be realised.

5) urban visions and public spaces – In the 20th century, developed countries were all fascinated by the urban vision of Le Corbusier and other pioneers of the early Modern Movement in architecture. Richard Sennett described and analysed the phenomenon of both ‘closed system’ and ‘open system’.²⁹ In a close system, selective implementable ideas were

vigorously applied to maximise efficiency, order and control by unprecedented proliferation of rules and bureaucratic regulations. Those actions reflected the top-down priorities of overcasting global capitalism. It is a system which freely uses strategies of contemporary risk management and rigid planning regulations as effective tools to contain and enforce uniformity and equilibrium. Fortunately, this rigid Western urban vision was ineffective in its application to developing economies. These developing countries are still able to retain much of their traditional urban complexity, excitement and vibrancy, notwithstanding the enormous stress of recent dramatic changes.³⁰ In the emerging New World Order today, we need an open system which will accept conflict, tolerate chaos and welcome new knowledge and unexpected progressive societal changes as well as positively facilitate democratic public spaces and citizen participation. This open system is clearly essential to realise our collective global vision of ecological sustainability and social justice for all.

Public spaces are spaces accessible to the community-at-large without hindrance or restriction. Besides parks, gardens and numerous urban open spaces, public spaces also include a diversity of the unstructured, unique and chaotic. They range from the numerous underused older buildings, gaps/leftover spaces from urban development and single-focus projects such as spaces below elevated highways to exciting night markets in Taipei³¹ and vibrant chaotic environments in Geylang and Little India in Singapore. These public spaces are rugged in nature and are able to withstand rapid usage changes, fragmented idiotic design expressions and uncompromisingly irrational spatial arrangements. I have described them as '*spaces of indeterminacy*'.³² They provide welcoming places for everyone without discrimination and a forum for strangers to meet and interact, innovators to experiment, artists and designers to show their wares and flaneurs to dream and wander. They offer the potential to become effective instruments of contemporary intellectual, artistic, cultural and sociological discourses. Their multi-functionalities are exciting and often unexpectedly creative, and can greatly contribute towards the intensity of urban vibrancy. The quality of urban social life is clearly not measured by the scale of monuments, its shopping malls, its commercial extravaganza or its top-down officially regulated activities and festival celebrations, but the quality and intensity of interactions by participating citizens.

6) incomplete urbanism – In the New World Order, the financial and banking sectors in the major cities will continue to be important though less so than before. The dominant pyramid-

like high density, high cost central urban core with numerous luxurious high-rise commercial offices will be seriously challenged. New generation of sophisticated mobile entrepreneurs with increasing use of ICT have less need for desk-centred space and can operate anywhere and at anytime, though they still prefer to be located in an environment to allow for their complex social contact and face-to-face interactions. This has generated growing demand for new informal working spaces of various sizes and quality in a casual low-rise environment.³³ In the meantime, when plot ratio is increased in major cities with high land prices, developers can quickly identify business opportunities and will purchase the land to develop properties to maximum permissible intensity. Existing buildings irrespective of design quality or historical values will be demolished as they are irrelevant in the investment calculation. This has occurred everywhere, particularly in the expanding major cities of emerging economies. In the process, much irreplaceable visual memories are lost. This challenging scenario leads us to examine the possibility of an alternative innovative urban planning arrangement in order to provide attractive working and living places for the new generation and at the same time, to neutralise the harmful impact of continuous tabula rasa's exercise everywhere.

I wish to propose that when increasing plot ratio, it should be uniformly applied to environmental areas surrounded by main roads, or to specific zones defined by geography or strips of land along main roads and water edges. Within each zone, projects are given flexibility to exceed the permissible plot ratio, but developers must purchase the extra plot ratio at regulated price. When buildings are preserved for interest of the community or when owners decide to keep their existing buildings, part of the bonus payment of underused plot ratio can be given to them. This approach will result in complex, open-ended and exciting urban forms with the character of each zone distinctively different from another. It will retain the old and the historical significant, and will prevent harmful demolition as well as will provide facilities for new and experimental. In the process, much of the historical urban environment and selected important architecture buildings can be saved from demolition. Some zones will be vibrant with incredible mix-usages particularly those located in close proximity to public transport. Furthermore, the timing to revise permissible plot ratio can be a continuous process for different zones in response to factors such as impact of new infrastructure resulting in greater accessibility. Dynamic urban growth is a complicated evolutionary phenomenon and a continuous dialogue between past, present and future. It is not about erasure – a brutal interpretation of tabula rasa. It is important to realise that this

complex theory which I will call '*incomplete urbanism*' is yet untried and will require much more study before implementation.

7) architecture, urbanism and contemporariness - After WWII, the Modern Movement was restructured and hijacked by American MNCs as an effective tool for their overseas expansion. The International Style has been established with aesthetic standardization and universalization of the end products for quick adaptation. This dramatically compromised and constricted architects' creativity. Simultaneously, capitalist-inspired urban theories including massive destruction of traditional city centres are widely implemented in many emerging economies like China today. Cities are treated as if they are interchangeable and design statements for their buildings are transferable anywhere. Historically, icons in cities were identified, acknowledged and incorporated over time by the urban citizenry. In the current age of competition between cities, instant iconicity is sought. Icons are now enmeshed in the cycle of speed, wealth, fame, technology and do not necessarily relate to unique characteristics of their locations. These projects are doomed to fail as their ludicrous pretensions and fashionable theme-park images have completely neglected the essentiality of site-specific cultural and local rootedness.³⁴ Directions of architecture and urbanism today are in total confusion. All the architectural ISMs and urban theories in the last few decades have failed badly to provide the necessary creative energy and ideological anchorage to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing and increasingly complex world particularly in the emerging economies. The International Style's generic appeal and the iconic illusionary magic are clearly no longer relevant. Speculative properties disguised as architecture and investment opportunities have absorbed high amount of surplus capital and are not sustainable.

In the last decade, the new global scenario has generated an unprecedented vibrant environment and self-confidence in the non-West creative communities. Many are now able to effectively operate on the global stage, to win international recognitions and to achieve glocal excellence where both global and local elements are clearly visible. Their innovative ideas have invariably anchored into cultural, social, environmental and economic conditions in response to climate and specific site locations. Increasingly, new ethical values and development priorities everywhere are being put in place in response to ecological demands and urban environmental sustainability. Architecture and urbanism will change dramatically to stay ahead of the curve. Presently, incredibly exciting and pluralistic aesthetic experiments

in architecture are already occurring everywhere. Many long-held urban theories are being contested as new social and economic conditions demand new solutions. Cities must evolve and develop through carefully layering over the past mental space in order to strengthen the spatial memories of citizens over time. It is well to remember that “in the end, our society will be defined not only by what we create, but by what we refuse to destroy.”³⁵

In the contemporary world, social norms and values have to constantly face the threat of being uprooted and destabilised by the frenetic speed particularly in the emerging economies. Contemporary culture is an important mediating sphere through which citizens can find appropriate spaces for themselves. It often critically engages the community in examining and contesting a wide range of core mainstream positions – from ethnicity, class and gender to expressions of identity and sexual orientation. Contemporary society has presented an immense challenge to the relevance of criticality. Criticality is an important key to a means by which we understand ourselves. Ideas and values that constitute crucial elements of society are constantly in flux. A critical mind allows one to fiercely resist static mainstream values and continually question their relevance. It is vital to have a clear understanding of the evolving and dynamic complexity in our contemporary environment and to meet the challenges which can only be mastered in an open, pluralistic society: one that accommodates - and even encourages differences – and celebrates the rapid expansion of new knowledge. A new global vision is emerging where governments must institute quality of life for all citizens as a key ethos and core value. Decision-makers must continuously redefine and adjust their cultural and ethical systems towards the exciting changes and dynamic challenges of contemporariness.

Relevance to city X (Singapore)

In the third part of this lecture, I will project the possible relevance and implications of my earlier analysis to Singapore with brief remarks and questions.

1) Global City

- a) In the New World Order, it is no longer necessary for emerging global cities to perform as peripheral supports to the primate global cities of capitalism.

- b) It is clearly impossible for Singapore to be fully integrated with its large surrounding areas to form a global city region.
- c) However, Singapore can effectively re-activate its traditional expertise in entrepot trade as a basis to develop its unique capability.
- d) The government should redirect its global ambition and offer a generous helping hand to local entrepreneurs towards becoming a vibrant regional centre for trades and services.

2) Population Policy

- a) For Singapore, population size is now not an essential criteria. Similar to other cities in developed economies, Singapore's population is unlikely to achieve a self-replacement level. Selective immigration for long-term population stability is obviously necessary.
- b) All great cities throughout the ages everywhere need continuous infusion of skills and talents from outside. Singapore is no exception. Foreign talents are important for Singapore's survival but should also consciously include young creative individuals from the design and art communities.
- c) However, Singapore must urgently examine the long term implications of having large numbers of low-skill low-wage foreign workers. These workers will be rotated and replaced, but further increase in numbers is undesirable.
- d) Singapore should stabilise its population at 5 to 5.5 million including foreign workers. This will have great impact towards environmental sustainability and quality of life for all.

3) Property Demand

- a) Financial sectors everywhere will be more regulated and less privileged. Rentals in large high-rise offices in central areas of major cities will be moderated. In Singapore, the present substantial rental downgrading appears realistic, especially taking into account priority of young entrepreneurs to operate in more informal and modest places.

- b) Rapid price escalation in the private residential sector badly needs a reality check to assure better understanding of factors relating to affordability and projected rental income.
- c) A possible justification for substantial price increase in the high income sector is the perception of Singapore being an attractive residential location for families of the super-rich.
- d) One of the most challenging policies is to provide affordable and adequate public housing for all low-income citizens. Sale prices based on market mechanism cannot be an effective tool for everyone. To return to basic formula of affordability, the assumed land cost must be greatly reduced and sale prices should be adjusted accordingly. However, HDB should also re-introduce tough restrictions against profiting from subsequent resale. New owners should be offered this alternative option.

4) Social Justice

- a) A major challenge in Singapore is the increasing income disparity and the negative impact of neo-liberal policies on the lower income group. Recent data and surveys have indicated the increasing hardship of the lower income working class and the income gap in Singapore comparing unfavourably with Seoul, Taipei and even Hong Kong.
- b) It is important therefore to regulate and control the massive number of foreign workers. They depress wages and productivity. Their presence has long prevented wage improvement of local workers, particularly in the service sector and construction industry.
- c) Quality of life for the underprivileged and elderly can be greatly improved by providing subsidised affordable fares for public transport. This will greatly enhance the usage and accessibility to the numerous public facilities such as parks and gardens as well as encourage more frequent visits to friends and relatives. The subsidy is affordable, the social benefit is immeasurable and can be implemented anytime.

5) Eco-urbanism

- a) Notwithstanding Singapore's increasing awareness of urban sustainability, more actions can still be taken on many fronts. They include: - encouraging use of compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs), minimising use of plastic bags particularly in supermarkets, discouraging sales of bottled water and regulating harmful food content in fast food outlets such as McDonalds.
- b) The use of bicycles for both work and leisure should be encouraged. Bicycles should be provided whenever possible, even using one of the existing car lanes. Bicycling is good for health, and makes economic sense for many workers. For the young, bicycling provides much greater freedom of movement and for socialising.
- c) Retrofitting of existing buildings including high-rise buildings should be positively encouraged. This is recognised as a major energy saving action in all large cities. Collective sales must be strictly regulated and even stopped as indiscriminate demolition is causing great harm to the collective visual urban memories of Singaporeans.

6) New Challenges

- a) Singapore's top-down efficient, clean and green urbanism together with excellent infrastructure and public transport has done well. Its major fault lines are the constant creation of the new with current planning theories, and are often done with indiscriminate destruction of the old and 'not so old' as well as the half-hearted attempts to preserve urban memories. Many urban theories today are being contested everywhere, as social and economic conditions now demand new solutions. My theoretical proposal of '*incomplete urbanism*' is an attempt to provide an alternative solution to some of the present urban dilemmas.
- b) The International Style's generic appeal and the iconic illusionary magic are clearly now no longer relevant. A new generation of Singapore architects has received well-deserved local and international recognitions. The challenges today are to firmly anchor cultural rootedness in their work, to direct their creative energy towards eco-urban sustainability, and to enrich the environmental quality and vibrancy of city life for the benefits of everyone.

¹ Jomo K.S and Ben Fine, ed., *The New Development Economics - After the Washington Consensus* (New York: Zed Books, 2006).

² Wolfgang Sachs and Tilman Santarius, *Fair Future: Resource Conflicts, Security and Global Justice* (London & New York: Zed Books, 2007): Section “Fair trade instead of free trade” in Chapter 6 Agreements for Fairness and Ecology, pp 196-215.

³ These personal observations were made in August/September 2009 and should be updated and altered with time.

⁴ See Paul Krugman, “Missing Richard Nixon”, *International Herald Tribune*. 1 Sep 2009. “Actually turning America around is going to take years of siege warfare against deeply entrenched interests, defending a deeply dysfunctional political system.”

⁵ See Thomas L. Friedman, “One-party Democracy”, in *International Herald Tribune*. 10 Sep 2009. “One-party autocracy certainly has its drawbacks. But when it is led by a reasonably enlightened group of people, as China is today, it can also have great advantages. That one party can just impose the politically difficult but critically important policies needed to move a society forward in the 21st century.”

⁶ Analysts have stressed that China should now give higher priority to growth of the service sector in order to generate substantially more job opportunities and better household income as well as increase in consumption as a share of national expansion in the present stage of her economic development.

⁷ See Orville Schell, “West seems paralysed as China powers ahead” in *The Straits Times*. 24 Sep 2009. “As governments across the West have become increasingly bogged down trying to fix a broken economy, China has been formulating a whole series of new, well-considered policies and forging ahead with bold decision-making to tackle one daunting problem after another.”

⁸ Paul Krugman, “Reform or bust” in *The International Herald Tribune*. 22 Sep 2009.

⁹ See Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress. Available at www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr. Also see Anna Teo, “A Himalayan solution for the world?” in *The Business Times*. 21 Sep 2009.

¹⁰ Data put together by Worldwatch Institute from various sources. See Christopher Flavin, *Worldwatch Report 178, Low-Carbon Energy: A Roadmap* (Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute, 2008): pp 21.

¹¹ George Johnson, “Plugging Into the Sun” in *National Geographic*, Vol. 216, No. 3 (Sep 2009): pp 28 –53.

¹² William S.W Lim, *Asian Alterity* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co., 2008): Section 1 “Multiple Modernities and Contemporariness” in Chapter 2 Modernities, pp 56-62.

¹³ Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP), *The Politics of Hunger: When Policies and Markets Fail the Poor* (Malaysia: PAN AP, 2008)

¹⁴ The impact towards a more productive, responsible and sustainable financial sector will certainly result in lesser demand for the high cost facilities particularly in the core central areas of global cities. Hopefully, essential drugs will soon be made available and affordable to everyone. Reducing the cost of drugs particularly in the United States is urgent, as it is a key factor to moderate and reduce the national health-care budget. See “Reds Under Our Meds”, in *The Economist*, Vol 392, No. 8646 (Aug 29 – Sep 4 2009), pp 57. “The new study, written by Donald Light, a visiting professor at Stanford University, claims that European drug firms are more innovative than American ones, in spite of price controls.”

¹⁵ Saskia Sassen, “Neither Global nor National: Novel Assemblages of Territory, Authority and Rights”, in *Ethics & Global Politics*, Vol. 1 No. 1-2, 2008, pp 61 – 79. Also see “Re-assembling the Urban” in *Urban Geography* (Bellwether Publishing, 2008): pp 113-126. “But I found that Chicago’s past was not a disadvantage. It was one key source of its competitive advantage. The knowledge economy that developed to

handle the needs of its agro-industrial regional economy gave Chicago a key component of its current specialized advantage in the global economy”: pp 119.

¹⁶ Paul Evans, “Historians and Chinese World Order: Fairbank, Wang, and the Matter of ‘Indeterminate Relevance’”, paper delivered at International Conference in Honour of Wang Gangwu’s Scholarship: ‘Bridging China Studies and International Relations Theory’, East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore (2009). “Both are sceptical about the existence of universal values, Western supremacy, the transferability of Western institutions and norms to Asia, and the prospect of a deep convergence of the West and Asia on Western terms.”, pp 6.

¹⁷ See “10, 000 Run Riot Over Stench – Villagers smash equipment and take officials hostage at Fujian sewage treatment plant” in *The Straits Times*. 3 Sep 2009.

¹⁸ See Henri Lefebvre, “The Right to the City” in *Writings on Cities*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996. Originally published as *Le droit à la ville*, Paris, Anthropos, 1968. Lefebvre’s concept was further discussed by David Harvey in “The Right to the City”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 27.4, Dec 2003, pp 939-974. Also see Harvey, “The Right to the City”, in *New Left Review*, Issue 53, September-October 2008.

¹⁹ Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)

²⁰ Edward W. Soja, “On the Concept of Global City Regions”, in *Glocalogue*, Issue 4 (2005) < http://artefact.mi2.hr/a04/lang_en/theory_soja_en.htm > (last accessed 11 Sep 2009)

²¹ See report on lecture given by Saskia Sassen organised by the Centre for Liveable Cities, Ministry of National Development, Singapore, “Cities should look to past strengths to leap forward”, *The Straits Times*, 22 Aug 2009.

²² “Indonesia’s regional leaders attract investors”, *Reuters*. 30 June 2009. Also see “Surakarta, on its way to being a MICE City”, *The Jakarta Post*. 26 Feb 2009 and “Joko ‘Jokowi’ Widodo: Changing the face of Surakarta”, *The Jakarta Post*. 29 Oct 2009. See Elizabeth Morrell, Hetifah Sjaifudian Sumarto and Noldy Tuerah, “Governing the Informal Economy”, Policy Brief 11 (2008) funded by Australia Indonesia Governance Research Partnership.

²³ See Tay Kheng Soon, “Rubanisation: The Re-Conceptualisation of Human Settlements in Harmony with the Environment”, 12 Nov 2008 < <http://www.rubanisation.org/2008/11/rubanisation-re-conceptualisation-of.html> > (last accessed 14 Sep 2009).

²⁴ Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006).

²⁵ William S.W Lim, “Urban Land Policy in East Asia from a Cultural Perspective” (2008), lecture delivered to Urban Land Institute, Singapore. Published in *SELAVIP Newsletter — Journal of Low-Income Housing in Asia and the World*, October 2008, pp 9-13 and in *SPACES* (Nepal), September-October, Vol 4, Issue 6 (2008), pp 44-50.

²⁶ See William S.W Lim, “Let’s Get Real – Critical Visions and Sustainable Eco-urbanism”, paper delivered at Workshop on “Towards a Liveable and Sustainable Urban Environment: Eco-cities in East Asia”, East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore (2009).

²⁷ See Ken Yeang, “Ecoskyscrapers and Ecomimesis: New tall building typologies”, paper delivered at CTBUH 8th World Congress 2008. Also see article on Ken Yeang, “Green design is more than just gadgets”, *The Straits Times*. 9 Sep 2009.

²⁸ William McDonough and Michael Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things* (North Point Press, 2002). Also see William McDonough and Michael Braungart, “Toward a Sustaining Architecture for the 21st Century”, in *Industry & Environment*, Vol. 26, No. 2-3 (April-Sept 2003).

²⁹ Richard Sennett, “The Open City”, in *Towards an Urban Age* newspaper, Urban Age Summit Berlin, November 2006.

³⁰ William S.W Lim, “Asian New Urbanism”, in *Asian New Urbanism* (Singapore: Select Publishing, 1998), pp 14-42.

³¹ Chaolee Kuo, ed., *Dark Discourse: Reflections of Taiwan City Culture* (National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, 2008).

³² William S.W Lim, “Spaces of Indeterminacy”, delivered at conference on Bridge the Gap?, Fukuoka, Japan, 24-27 Jul 2001 and published in Akiko Miyake & Hans Ulrich Obrist, eds., *Bridge the Gap?* (Kitakyushu: Centre for Contemporary Art and Koln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter Konig, 2002).

³³ Frank Duffy, “Lumbering to Extinction in the Digital Field: The Taylorist Office Building” in *Harvard Design Magazine*, Issue 29 (Fall/Winter 2008-9), pp 124 – 131.

³⁴ William S.W Lim, “Debunking the Icon-Myth”, lecture delivered at AAAsia Taiwan Workshop 2008. Published in SA Singapore Architect, Issue 247 (2008), pp 48-51, in Architecture + Design (India), Special Issue 2009, pp 60-63 and in Architecture Malaysia, Vol 21, Issue 1 (2009), pp 60-63.

³⁵ This famous quote was by John C. Sawhill, who was president and CEO of The Nature Conservancy (1990-2000) and the 12th President of New York University.