

Rio de Janeiro workshop on Sustainable Urban Planning and Development

2 – 12 November 2005

Working Concept

Workshop targets

The workshop will focus on selected issues of a sustainable urban development of the Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area, comparing planning and development of a small suburban village and the metropolitan centre.

Due to the tremendous economic, social and financial problems of Megacities, it is very complicated to achieve a concrete and substantial improvement of the urban development and to implement practical solutions for the ecological, structural and social development problems for the central metropolitan districts. Besides, one of the biggest hindrance to a sustainable development is the huge pressure on the Megacities to integrate the accelerating migration from the rural areas. For example, still 79 % of the Brazilian communities have less than 25.000 inhabitants whereas 75 % of the population live in the big urban agglomerations.

The small and smallest villages, however, have been facing a twofold critical challenge and disparity: In the remote rural areas these villages are heavily (socially and economically) declining, in the metropolitan areas the growth of population is accelerating without sufficient provisions for a sustainable urban development and integrated planning, lacking the necessary infrastructure, social security, recreation opportunities – only to mention a few of the tremendous shortcomings for a decent urban life. This leads to a vulnerable and instable situation.

From the Brazilian point of view, the best solution for a Megacity like Rio de Janeiro were to stabilize the development of the de-central circle of smaller but fast growing villages in the surroundings of the Metropolitan areas where the development can still be influenced by reasonable means; decentralisation can be directed with less resources, and the implementation of sustainable planning concepts can still remedy the worst-case development to be shown in already too many places. The thesis is that the solutions for Rio de Janeiro could be found in the smaller and de-central urban villages of the Metropolitan area.

Based on this idea, the workshop focuses on concepts for the revitalisation of one smaller community, São José do Val do Rio Preto in the State of Rio de Janeiro, and – besides and in a comparative view – concepts for the revitalisation of the old city centre of Rio itself.

São José can be looked at as a kind of “urban laboratory”. According to the needs of the São José municipality, the thematic of the concentrates on three selected areas which – as a result of a number of pre-projects with UFRJ and TFH Berlin as well as practical-political request from the village itself - turned out to be of key interest to the community:

- Modern procedures and instruments of an integrated urban planning, especially with regard to conservation of the town center and concepts of public space
- Concepts and organisation of civil participation in the process of urban development and renewal
- Residential (social) housing concepts for low income population which meet the demands of the growing population as well as the political/technical requirements at stake

All these objectives include, of course, interdisciplinary aspects and integrated development concepts like aspects of urban infrastructure (directing traffic, potable water supply and disposal of sewage and waste, or increase attraction for tourism).

Having regard to the city centre of Rio de Janeiro, the workshop focuses on selected projects and new strategies to revitalise the city centre and increase its attraction not only for tourists but also to improve the re-creation and leisure possibilities of local residents. The hitherto isolated “hot spots of attraction” must be bridged to create a more comprehensive area of social urban life across the still unsafe and dead-at-night mono-functionalist CBD - a project where UFRJ had been involved together with the RJ urban development departments.

There are many other development questions possible, however the selection of themes was in line with a kind of track-record of previous involvement of ALFA partners like UFRJ or Berlin as well as realistic chances to define more continuing practical projects as a result of the workshop within our own network approach.

Workshop Method

The workshop in RJ is not designed as a typical international conference where specialists only give a theoretically-based report to invited specialist attending the event, neither it is to produce already comprehensive or final solutions like models, architecturally designed areas, engineered constructions and final concepts ready to be implemented. All this would be difficult while the participants are still lacking the necessary, concrete background information. What is available as background knowledge can be found in the AURORA website documentation pool prior to the conference.

Instead, the workshop shall be a method and step forward to define and implement the research strategy of the ALFA project. Only at the end of the on-site visits and critical discussion, analyses and evaluation of the concrete development problems and concepts a series of more detailed projects can be defined and carried out by the AURORA network members' students, researchers and professors. This can also produce an input to the next workshops in Santiago and La Habana and so create a fruitful circle of practice and theory.

It is also the target to help the municipal practitioners (architects, civil engineers, planners) and local politicians getting better ideas and knowledge of good practice how to deal with the current projects for a sustainable urban development. For the municipalities and practitioners of planning and construction it would be very helpful to create a new view, perspective and way of thinking, to learn the good or bad experience of other countries/regions including experience of what went wrong and deadlocked. Even if good practice still requires special adaptation to become smoothly tailored to the particular circumstances, i.e. is not ready to be implemented immediately, anyway it helps to create these new ideas and incentives: A wider scope of thinking, integrating new ideas and concepts, critical attention of planning mistakes, integrated ways of thinking etc.

Contributions of Participants

Therefore, the contributions from the AURORA network partners in the workshop meeting in São José shall be predominantly less theoretical than practically oriented addressing practitioners of the village municipality.

Before the meetings in Brazil take place, the majority of the participants cannot have already sufficient knowledge and experience with the real situation of the Brazilian villages and cities, and it is exactly part of the problem that the basic data, development concepts and clearly defined projects are missing. Therefore, how can be the international expert contribution expected as an input to the workshop, and how everybody could best prepare to the event without all the necessary details.

However, having in mind the main targets and objectives of the workshop it is not at all envisaged to give ready solutions, it is more the idea that all group members report on their own good or bad experience, good-practice examples and models, conceptual approaches or legal and societal framework. The workshop shall be organised as a think-tank to produce better-tailored concepts and suitable recommendations and – finally open the eyes for a new perspective to tackle the challenge of sustainable urban development under all real circumstances like problematic social situation, lacking or insufficient planning information, resources, simple conditions, etc.

It must be kept in mind that knowledge transfer is no one-way road but all experts come as learners in a certain way. The ALFA group members will bring a broad variety of experience and knowledge developed in a specific context. Their presentation of suitable concepts, ideas, model and plan reflects already an anticipated Brazilian reality, and when combining pre-knowledge and reflection against the exposure to the Brazilian urban reality and practice, all the necessary creativity is set free to melt all this together into a comprehensive, integrated and comparative result.

To summarize, this means the workshop starts with on-site investigations and explorations and short, practice-oriented presentations of similar processes and experiences of the participants based on their view from the home country together with anticipations of the Brazilian situation.

As a second step, previous views and exposure to the situation lead to an improvement of concepts, recommendations, models, solutions valuable for the urban process and needs.

As a third step, the practical concepts and experience will be reviewed and evaluated in a more theoretical way to define the research strategy of the AURORA network including concrete projects in RJ to be put into practice thereafter. Within this phase, a two days conference at UFRJ enables, of course, a more theoretically reflected presentation and exchange of ideas to set up a more academic discussion among specialists.

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