

Peter Hall<sup>1</sup> & Ulrich Pfeiffer<sup>2</sup>

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## **URBAN FUTURE 21: a global agenda for twenty-first century cities<sup>3</sup>**

With the publication of *URBAN FUTURE 21: a global agenda for twenty-first century cities*, Hall and Pfeiffer present a document that has depth in quality, and a text that is integrated with graphics, references to policies of international humanitarian bodies, as well as a bibliography including references from Charles Dickens (1854) to a readily accessible Website. Open-ended questions are posed throughout the book forcing the reader to form an opinion, or at least think about one.

City life has become more polluted, more dangerous, and more violent. Cities are places that offer both opportunities and risks. People come to the city voluntarily. Present indications are that the urban poor are unlikely to get what they wish for. These poor people depend on nobody but themselves. The central theme in the book is that poverty can be regarded as the greatest threat in achieving a good environment.

It is with optimism that the authors give certain prescriptions for the sustainable city in chapter 1. This city should provide an environment that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations. However, the price for any economic development should be part of the equation, whilst income distribution, democratic participation and empowerment should also be considered.

Chapter 2 concentrates on the driving forces that should create new opportunities for the city dweller. In terms of demographics, Hall and Pfeiffer argue that in developing countries a young

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1 Sir Peter Hall, the Bartlett Professor of Planning in the University College of London, acted as commission moderator for the 2000 World URBAN 21 conference in Berlin, 'World report on the urban future'.

2 Ulrich Pfeiffer, secretariat of the commission, is the managing director of *emperica*, Bonn, an economist and experienced consultant for the German federal government, and the author of *Germany: development policy for a developed country*.

3 Book review by Jacques Laubscher, lecturer in the Department of Architecture, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, Republic of South Africa.

population with an urban explosion is highly prevalent. Cities offer prospects of jobs and a possible escape from traditional practices. According to the authors, this combination often proves irresistible. However, in developed cities the birthrate is considered low (in some instances the birth rates have dropped to below replacement levels) and this poses other problems.

In order to enhance local government's ability to manage social change, urban governance should interact with the local economy and other external forces. Hall and Pfeiffer describe three kinds of cities (2000: 139):

- The city coping with informal hyper growth
- The city coping with dynamic growth, and
- The weakening mature city coping with ageing.

Chapter 3 compares two scenarios for each of the above cities in the urban world of 2025. The authors make use of two columns to compare results of business as usual with alternative policies implemented in a sensitive manner. Although this might seem a somewhat over-simplified method of conveying information, it allows the reader to compare results and formulate his/her own opinion.

In chapter 4 the authors move from prediction to prescription. Hall and Pfeiffer argue for a more sustainable direction in the urban world together with a more integrated policy approach between different levels of government. Section 24 of the South African Bill of Rights is quoted (Hall & Pfeiffer, 2000: 163):

*Everyone has the right [...] to have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that [...] secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources, while promoting justifiable economic and social development.*

Various definitions of sustainable development are given in the book, while rules for good governance, the environment, economic policy, and infrastructure are also described. The authors attempt to give practical advice on both a national and city level for the three kinds of cities listed above.

Cities have to be livable and we find several dimensions to this statement according to Hall and Pfeiffer (2000: 334): "[ ... ] a decent home for every citizen, a built environment rich in urban design, with good quality services, easy access, varied land use,

cultural complexity diversity, and the right mixture of vibrancy and tranquility." The value of this publication lies in the fact that the urban future is not only discussed on a theoretical level but that practical advice is also given, both for developed- and developing countries.

In conclusion, I am of the opinion that this should become compulsory reading for all decision-makers. This attitude, however, will constitute one of NIMBY. This document should perhaps also form part of the university curriculum in numerous disciplines; it could even be studied at school level. All the answers for our unique environment cannot be found in this book, but I am certain that it will aid in the decision-making process. In my opinion, this process is not limited to policy, but can also be applied to daily life.

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