

Urban Design Looking Forward

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When I look ahead after practicing urban design for some thirty years, I see territories of enormous potential. In response to marketplace necessities and individual self-interests, cities are swelling, bursting their boundaries with migration, immigration, and, particularly in less developed areas, new generations. Data collection and sophisticated mapping techniques are making this urbanization at least partially graspable, as we saw, for example, in Ricky Burdett's summer 2007 Global Cities exhibition in Venice. Demographers and sociologists are expanding, analyzing, and recompiling our understanding of urban populations, as we read, for instance, in the July 2007 proceedings of the Rockefeller Foundation's Global Summit. Capital is whizzing around the globe, rewarding market transparency and risk-taking.

Twenty-first-century urbanization is different. It is simultaneously global and geographically specific. As projected by the United Nations, the benchmark date on which, for the first time, more than half of the world's population will live in urban areas will occur in 2008. On continents where industrial economies developed in the nineteenth century, this is not new; in these places, the portion of population living in urban areas has exceeded 75 percent for some time. North America and Latin America, the next foci of industrialization, are only slightly less urbanized. But now Asia and Africa are undergoing