

PREVIEW

**TOWARDS AN OPEN CITY**  
THE QUITO PAPERS AND  
THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

JOAN CLOS  
RICHARD SENNETT  
WITH RICKY BURDETT AND SASKIA SASSEN

EDITED BY FILIEP DECORTE AND ANDREW RUDD



# MOVING BEYOND THE CHARTER OF ATHENS

As Ricky Burdett argues, cities today are being made and re-made at a faster pace and at a larger scale than ever before. The way they are planned and designed is lodged in an ideological and spatial model that is, at best, 80 years out-of-date. Despite the increasing complexity and specificity of the global urban condition, many of the 94 recommendations of the 1933 Charter of Athens still determine the generic forms and physical organisation of 21st century city. 'Urban space' has increasingly become the territory of negotiation and confrontation between public and private interests; between politicians, planners, architects and real estate agents; and between banks, financial institutions, speculators, developers and landowners. Yet, the physical solutions remain stubbornly uniform – despite the diversity of architectural styles and commissioning bodies – reflecting a close affinity between the realpolitik of urbanization and the vested interests of the key actors involved in shaping urban planning regimes. The Charter's spatial recommendations have played an instrumental role in the dynamics of these transactions in many cities across the globe since its publication in the aftermath of World War II.

A glance at different hotspots of urbanization confirms that the original recommendations and the implied ideologies of the Charter of Athens are alive and well. For example, the premise that 'the four keys to urban planning are the four functions of the city: dwelling, work, recreation [and] transportation' still determines the

spatial logic of many 'planned' cities today, despite major changes in the way in which domestic life, labour relations, manufacturing, industry and technology are organised. The belief that 'pedestrian routes and automobile routes should follow separate paths' still dominates planning orthodoxy, prioritising the needs of the private car despite the increased awareness of the negative impacts on sociability and sustainability. And, the conviction that 'unsanitary slums should be demolished and replaced by open space' is the guiding principle of many planning regimes that struggle to find the space, land or money to provide decent homes for millions of new urban dwellers.

There is an authority (and simplicity) to the language of the Charter of Athens that reflects its technocratic origins. A century ago cities were seen as the repositories of poverty, overcrowding and ill-health. High population densities in central city areas were to blame. 'Chaos has entered into the cities', the Charter declaimed, but it could be tamed by deploying a number of technical instruments and imposing a set of planning regulations. The combined effect of these apparently neutral technical propositions are the highly fragmented, starkly differentiated and, at times, sparsely populated 'planned' urban landscapes of the late 20th century and early 21st century city. A by-product of the reduction in density of occupation and the removal of the street has been the erosion of the public realm. As a consequence, the potential for transactions and

unplanned encounter has diminished, sucking the lifeblood out of city life and deadening everyday urban experience. What has resulted, nearly a century after the Charter's conception, is a pervasive and generic urban genre which indeed imposes a degree of order; but an inflexible and 'brittle' one that ultimately works against the potential of generating a sense of urbanity or city-ness.

While the Charter ends with the exhortation that 'private interests should be subordinated to the interests of the community', evidence suggests that many of its principles have inadvertently supported the process of land speculation and increased segregation. For example, prescriptive zoning regulations, which determine the amount and type of development in specific urban districts, have been easily manipulated by lawyers, landowners and investors to maximise value and stifle competition (and, at times, facilitate corruption of malleable city officials).

The adoption of major road programmes advocated by the Charter of Athens has led to the destruction of inconveniently located neighbourhoods, damaging the fragile ecologies of existing urban communities and opening up the potential for displacement and resettlement in peripheral areas without access to public transport and jobs. Ultimately the fixed model implied by the Charter has proven unable to adapt to changing circumstances over time, acting as a constraint to progress and change.

The tabula rasa ('blank slate') approach to planning is predicated on the notion that problematic, unhealthy neighbourhoods should be demolished to make space for new development. Its physical manifestation appeals to landowners and investors who prefer the uncomplicated nature of zoning, land-use and density regulations, and the certainty that comes with 'big planning'. It is in this space that the interests of local politics and private capital often align – especially in contexts where corruption and favouritism are rife. The complex and messy process of 'urban retrofitting' of spaces and communities is far more difficult to implement than whole-scale regeneration or building on greenfield sites. It requires an understanding of local conditions and subtle negotiation with potentially problematic actors who – where democratic process allow – intercede and delay the complex process of construction and reconstruction.

Not only have the urban conditions changed since the early-20th century, but so have the forces that shape the urban environment. While less than 20% of the world's population lived in cities in the 1930s when the Charter was being discussed, we are gradually moving to a planet inhabited principally by urban dwellers. The exponential rise in urbanization and globalisation, the transformative effects of new technologies, the implications of climate change and resource scarcity, and the profound increase in inequality have impacted the dynamics of urban growth. Yet, we adhere to

technical and spatial solutions that are not only outdated but have demonstrably failed to create liveable and sustainable cities, as set out also in the following chapters.

Planning departments of municipal, metropolitan and central governments are highly regulated and risk-averse, preferring to work with anachronistic, uni-dimensional and rigid urban models conceived before World War II rather than search out new models that respond to the complex social and environmental exigencies of 21st century urbanization.

One of the critical aspects of contemporary urbanization that did not preoccupy the authors of the Charter of Athens is the stark difference in patterns of distribution of inequality. Today, 75% of the world's cities have higher levels of income inequalities than two decades ago. What we are observing today, especially in cities of the developing world, is that social inequality is becoming increasingly segregated and spatialized. Designers, developers, investors and policymakers are faced with increasingly tough choices as to how to intervene within changing urban physical and social landscapes. Who is the city for? How do you reconcile public and private interests? Who pays and who gains? The city planners of London, Paris, Barcelona, Hamburg and New York are grappling with the same questions as the urban leaders of African, Latin American and Asian cities, even though the levels of deprivation and requirements for social infrastructure

are of a different order of magnitude. Yet, the design and planning solutions – often imported via international professional offices and consultants – offer remarkably similar solutions whose roots can be traced back to mid-20th century.

The patterns of urbanization today require a re-framing of the discourse and practice of planning, one that questions the very tenets of the Charter of Athens and challenges the value of anachronistic 'bottom-up vs top-down' models, so heavily rooted in western urbanism. More work is needed to complement the New Urban Agenda, helping to mark a paradigm shift away from the rigidity of the technocratic, generic modernist model we have inherited from the Charter of Athens towards a more open, malleable and incremental urbanism that recognizes the role of space and place – and how they are shaped by planning and design – in making cities more equitable.

# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

*Toward an Open City: The Quito Papers and the New Urban Agenda is a working title and subject to change.*

## Overall supervision

For UN-Habitat: Dr. Joan Clos, Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

For New York University: Richard Sennett, Professor of Humanities, New York University, Professor of Sociology, The London School of Economics and Political Science

## Editors

Filiep Decorte, UN-Habitat  
Andrew Rudd, UN-Habitat

## Authors of main papers (in alphabetical order):

Ricky Burdett, Professor of Urban Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science and the director of LSE Cities and the Urban Age project

Saskia Sassen, Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology at Columbia University

Richard Sennett, Professor of Humanities, New York University, Professor of Sociology, The London School of Economics and Political Science

## Authors of other selectively abridged papers (in alphabetical order):

Shlomo Angel, Gianpaolo Baiocchi, Anita Berrizbeitia, John Bingham-Hall, Loeiz Bourdic, Amica Dall, Alka Dev, Marcello di Paola, Jane Harrison, Sara Hertog, Dale Jamieson, Adam Kaasa, Marco Kamiya, Jean-Louis Missika, Henk Ovink, Serge Salat, Giles Smith

## Lay-out, Illustrations, photos

Marshall Allen, Paola Chapdelaine, Muhammad Saleh, Wouter Verstraete

Thanks also to Dominick Bagnato of Theatrum Mundi for his assistance and support and Matthew Skjonsberg and Clay Strange for their initial research inputs

## Foreword

Joan Clos

## Afterword Why 'The Quito Papers'?

Richard Sennett and Ricky Burdett

Bibliography

## 1 The Empirical Science of Good Urbanization 18

Growing differences in population dynamics require focus- and speed-differentiated approaches to good urbanization 20

UN-Habitat Sample of Cities: evidence of negative trends that require major adjustments 32

Good urbanization requires a three decade time horizon, a focus on value creation, capture and sharing and a compact between all levels of government 48

## 2 Note on Redistribution Policies 146

Joan Clos

## 3 The Open City 176

Richard Sennett

## New Questions of Migration, Land and Water 62

A massive loss of habitat is accelerating and driving new flows of migration 64

Large scale urban land acquisitions could de-urbanize our cities and undermine public control 72

Lack of access to water, as the last substantive commons on the planet, and the risks caused by an excess of water require a rethinking on the place and 78

## A Conversation Between Richard Sennett and Joan Clos 150

Ricky Burdett

## Urban Democracy and the Right to the City 88

If democracy is to survive it will have to resist internal populism and embrace external cooperation 90

Planning without democracy or democracy without planning? How cities might have it both ways 96

Integrative networks combine government-led and self-led approaches and expand the right to the city 104

Saskia Sassen


## The Open City and the Commons 112

Open-system thinking and designing allow cities to evolve and change 114

Commons can compensate for public/private deficiencies, but they elude large-scale application in cities 124

Contemporary urbanism provides the opportunity to set aside the destructive tabula rasa in favour of an ethic of cohabitation 132

Planning and design should focus on metropolitan order and small scale interventions that can adapt over time, allow appropriation and bridge social inequalities 138



## Forward

Joan Clos

The New Urban Agenda, as adopted in the Habitat III Conference in Quito represents an important milestone. The commitments from Member States are concrete and allow us all to take an important step forward in ensuring that urbanisation becomes a tool for development moving beyond the limitations from Habitat I and II, which focused on the problems associated with urbanisation and the role of local governments.

The debate should not stop here. This publication intends to stimulate further critical thinking on the key challenges of our rapidly evolving urban world and hopes to inspire policy makers, practitioners and engaged citizens. It draws on an ongoing rich dialogue I had the pleasure of taking part in over

the last years with thought leaders such as Richard Sennett, Saskia Sassen, and Ricky Burdett from the London School of Economics Cities Programme and the Urban Age series and Shlomo Angel of the New York University.

In our current world, the success of the New Urban Agenda depends on the actions taken by national governments and the compact they make with local governments through their national urban policies. It is a conversation I hope we can broaden and use to prioritize our actions further and lead to even bolder political commitments.



© NASA

## A massive loss of habitat is accelerating and driving new flows of migration

*Extracted from Chapter 2: New Questions of Migration, Land and Water*

### Emerging flows of migration point to structural changes in the areas of origin

In her current research Saskia Sassen is focusing on a particular set of new migrations that have emerged recently; such migrations are generally far smaller than ongoing older migrations. New migrations are of interest in that they help us understand why a given flow starts and hence tell us something about a larger shifting context. This is the migrant as indicator of emerging changes in the area where they come from, whose impact over time and at scale is still to be fully understood and visible.

She is examining three flows. The first is the sharp increase in the migration of unaccompanied minors from Central America specifically, Honduras, Salvador, and Guatemala. The second is the surge in Rohingyas fleeing from

Myanmar. And the third is the migration toward Europe originating mostly in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and several African countries, notably Eritrea and Somalia.

These are three very different types of flows, and the third one contains enormously diverse flows. Yet each points to a larger context marked by mostly extreme conditions that can be outlined. The flows are not simply part of a chain migration where households play the central role and make an economic calculus pushing particular family members to opt for migration. The three flows emerge, even though only partially, from situations larger than the internal logics of households and the vagaries of national or local economies. These conditions are oper-

ating, at the city level, at the regional level, and at a global geopolitical level.

The flows are to be distinguished from the million-plus regular immigrants in the world today, who are mostly modest middle class, increasingly joined by professionals functioning in the global economy. Immigrants enter through formal channels or become formalized eventually in their new home countries. Today's immigrants are not the poorest in their countries of origin.

Extreme violence is one key factor explaining these new migrations. But it is not the only one. A second key factor is: thirty years of international development policies which have left much land dead. Mining, land



The Old City of Homs has been destroyed by years of conflict, Syria  
© Andrew McConnell / UNHCR



Syrian refugees arriving by boat on the island of Lesbos from Turkey, Greece  
© Andrew McConnell / UNHCR

grabs, and plantation agriculture have expelled directly and indirectly whole communities from their habitats. Moving to the slums of large cities, or, for those who can afford it, outward migration has increasingly become the last option. This multi-decade history of destructions and expulsions has now reached extreme levels made visible in vast stretches of land and water bodies that are now dead. At least some of the localized wars and conflicts arise from these destructions, in a fight for habitat. Climate change, through increased droughts and/or floods, further reduces liveable ground.

These are flows that have only recently started or, if older, have only recently taken on their present sharp features. They point to larger histories and

geographies in the making. They could eventually become overwhelming — to existing immigration and refugee policy systems, to the mostly urban areas receiving them, and to the men, women, and children who constitute these flows.

# AFTERWORD

## WHY 'THE QUITO PAPERS'?

### RICHARD SENNETT AND RICKY BURDETT



High-rise apartments, Shanghai (Urban Age / LSE Cities 2016)  
© Christian Petersen-Clausen / Getty Images

Like many of the participants who took part in the Habitat III conference held in Quito in 2016 – an epochal event that occurs every 20 years – we knew that something good would come out of it. We watched with interest as thousands of urbanists, policymakers and scholars engaged with the lengthy process of agreeing on the manuscript for the New Urban Agenda. We queued in the sun alongside 30,000 others in Quito to witness the adoption by 167 signatory nations of a document that will now shape the debate in global urban policy for decades to come.

But we also knew that this historic event was an opportunity to engage in a parallel process: to radically re-think the way we talk about and make our

cities. We shared with Joan Clos – executive director of UN-Habitat and the inspiration behind Habitat III – the belief that the physical and the social are deeply connected in cities, but that somehow the fragile connection was broken by the principles of the Modern Movement enshrined in the 1933 Charter of Athens. This manifesto, conceived on a cruise-ship in the Mediterranean by the leading Modern architects and planners of the day, still influences the shape and the dynamics of urban form 80 years after its formulation. From 'towers in the park', to the 'separation of cars and pedestrians' and the 'zoning of different uses', the Charter provided technical answers to the complex problems of the mid-20th century city.

The built reality of this rationalist vision is palpable in cities and peripheries globally. Regularly spaced high-rise towers, separated by dead space and wide roads into rigid functional zones define the instant cities of Songdo in South Korea, Gurgaon in India and the new urban realities of Kigali and Luanda. Similar typologies mark the dormitory towns on the edges of Istanbul and the centrally planned metropolitan uber-region of Jing-Jin-Ji (120 million people around Beijing) and the economic hubs of the Yangtze and Pearl River deltas in China. These landscapes are familiar, even common-place in different geographies of the urbanizing world.

We felt there was an opportunity, which Dr. Clos and UN-Habitat embraced, not to offer a 21st century version of the Charter, but to start a discussion that both challenged the status quo and opened up new lines of enquiry. The 'Quito Papers' are just that: a collection of statements, considerations and observations which emerge from discussions coordinated by Richard Sennett at NYU with a number of individuals and institutions from different disciplines and professions. The content is intentionally broad, ranging from architecture, planning and urban design, to land ownership and regulation, water management and environmental philosophy. Together, the contributions form a multifaceted assembly of perspectives that critique the tenets of the

Charter of Athens, identify new trends and propose new insights on contemporary urbanization.

UN-Habitat has also contributed new research to provide a more complex and complete picture on patterns on global urbanization, focussing on the way cities are expanding without control and highlighting the risks associated with weak leadership and chronic under-investment. The document importantly underscores Dr Clos' belief that the nation-state plays a critical role in addressing the problems and opportunities of cities across the globe and that we need to re-learn how to plan cities with well-designed public space as a shared common good.

Unlike the 1933 Charter of Athens, the 2016 'Quito Papers' do not propose a manifesto made up of simplistic slogans and recommendations. This is intentional. The urban condition of the 21st century is more fragile and more complex. It requires a different approach.

The 'Quito Papers' offer a mirror to cities today. They reflect the potential for wider and more inclusive debate made possible by advances in technology and sharing of information. They recognise that urbanization is incomplete, messy and organic and that the new urban discourse needs to be reflexive of these technologies and processes.

*Many of the 94 recommendations of the 1933 Charter of Athens still determine the generic forms and physical organization of the 21st century city.*



Savda Ghevra, Delhi, India. 2016  
© Julia King

The ideas presented in this document are intended to provoke greater imagination, not propose policies and solutions. Central to this effort is a re-examination of the strict functionalist separation of activities that still dominates planning practices worldwide. It argues in favour of clustering over segregation and isolation. It promotes a line of thinking that recognises the importance of context and time in city-making. The new paradigm encourages the embracement of a broader time horizon, with openness to the past and the anticipation of an uncertain future. It embraces the concepts of flexibility and resilience, accommodating heterogeneity and change, in ways that allow people to re-appropriate spaces and places. Unlike the temporal and spatial cer-

tainties of past models, the emerging discourse on cities acknowledges experience, temporality and surprise as central to the choreography of city-making.

Ultimately, the Quito Papers recognise that urbanization is a necessarily open process that is both iterative and incomplete – just like the cities where most of the world's population will live in a few generations from now. We see this document as a complement to the New Urban Agenda. One of the key legacies of Habitat III should be to mark a paradigm shift away from the rigidity of the technocratic, generic modernist model we have inherited from the Charter of Athens towards a more open, malleable and incremental urbanism that recognises the role of

design and space in making cities more equitable. We hope that the 'Quito Papers' can contribute to this collective effort.

For updates on this publication send an email to  
[HabitatNY@un.org](mailto:HabitatNY@un.org)