

## Editorial

Global history has achieved its impressive progress not least by suggesting intellectual entanglements between previously little connected fields of research. The present issue is a further example of this successful strategy. The editors have succeeded in bringing together specialists in the history of development with the young field of global urban history and putting them into a fruitful dialogue. The history of development has a long tradition, but it has often been concerned with the involvement of international organizations, national frameworks, or the imperial constellations of metropolis and (former) colony.

It is by no means a new insight that urbanization is not only a sign of “development” but also poses enormous challenges to exactly this development. With an accuracy that is impressive at first glance, statisticians announced some years ago that the time had come when more people would live in cities than in the countryside. This statement was visualized with two intersecting trend lines, so that everyone can see that this tendency will linearly expand into the future – reversal is out of the question. But what does it mean to live in a city? Do seemingly unambiguous conventions calculate that every community of more than 2000 inhabitants should be called a city (as the French administration assumes) or that one should orientate oneself by historically grown city law (as in the German case)? Obviously not, because the cities of the Global South, be they of megalomaniacal proportions or just average greetings, obviously do not follow such criteria from European historical tradition. They do not grow restricted by planning law and cadastre, but rather proliferate into a surrounding area that is difficult to delimit; people change, whatever the above-mentioned statistics suggest about their stationary way of life, back and forth between city and countryside, sometimes daily, sometimes seasonally. Urban infrastructures can hardly keep up with such fluidity, quite apart from the fact that they often have colonial origins and were designed to make life easier for

colonial elites and their successors after independence rather than to satisfy the needs of the indigenous poor and subaltern.

This issue draws attention to the fact that these processes have long been the subject of a community interested and active in development policy, and that a look in the historical rear-view mirror can help to raise awareness again of the diversity of attempts to understand, work on and solve the problem of urban development in the Global South before embarking on the next initiative. Historians are not among the main actors on the development policy scene, which is dominated by practitioners trained in the social sciences, but they can contribute important insights on historical agency and the contextualization of the emergence and transformations of mega-cities, as the historiographical overview that the editors of this issue precede the contributions shows. Two aspects in particular are brought to the fore: the first concerns a series of problems related to the accommodation of such large numbers of people in extremely limited space, ranging from colonial segregation to social housing and the persistence of huge slums as the hallmark of modern cities in the Global South. Connected to the housing issue is the attention to the explosive social situation and the potential of political upheavals that lie in this concentration of people. Accordingly, a long tradition of planning fantasies can be traced, which were not only aimed at alleviating problems of the ever-growing cities in Asia, Latin America and Africa and avoiding their destabilizing effect for individual societies and the two opposite camps during the Cold War, but also at identifying lessons for urban planning in Europe and North America.

This “transnational turn” in the history of urban planning is about to replace an all too flat Eurocentrism, the failure of which can be observed by every visitor who approaches the former colonial cities from the outside towards the centre. As a result, we now have at our disposal a larger number of studies that address the cities in the Global South and no longer take it for granted that solutions from the North will be realized in the South with a certain time lag, but that the cities between Sao Paulo and Maputo are independent socio-political equations and laboratories of original social and political movements. This provides a noteworthy analysis and a rich source of illustrative material, which challenges those development policies that formulate their “offers of help” without taking social realities sufficiently into account.

If we can currently observe a growing attention to strategies of resilience, which process the experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the rapidly growing importance of the climate crisis for any societal strategy and the intensification of the attempts to decouple the USA and China, then it is appropriate to look at the mega-cities of the Global South, which, due to their long-lasting resource weakness, have for many decades had to pay much more attention to their vulnerability (and especially that of their socially weakest). The present issue is an invitation to familiarize oneself with the state of the art of research in an area whose significance is growing not only for Mexico City and Shanghai, but also for Paris with its banlieues in France or Saint Louis in the USA.