**Between the people and the polis**

**Southasia’s mega-cities and the urban future**

**Arif Hasan**

***Arif Hasan delivered the prestigious HIMAL Annual Lecture in Dehli at the India International Centre on 25 November 2014. The transcript of the lecture is given below.***

Well, first of all, Kanak, *Himal* and the India International Centre, thank you so much for having arranged this and having invited me.

Delhi is special to me. I was born here, and left Delhi on the last train that ever went from Delhi to Karachi. That was the 15th of August, 1947. So it’s always nice, in a way, being back in Delhi.

The contents of my talk are drawn from my research work, teaching and activism in Pakistan in general, and in Karachi in particular. But you know, I have had the privilege of having been associated with programmes and projects in a number of cities in Southasia and in Asia in general, and over the last two and a half decades, I worked on a number of projects in these countries and have had the benefit of meeting their planners, government officials and NGO activists, and on occasion spent some time with the communities that live in these cities.

The subject of megacities has been discussed almost to death. It is something that is written about. The economists write about the economic aspects of it; environmentalists write about the terrible environmental conditions. The planners write about the infrastructure issues that are so damaging to the lives of poor communities. And now, you can add climate change to it. All these discussions take place in the press all the time, and also are subjects of academic research. They are all available on the net. I will approach this issue from a somewhat different perspective. I will talk about the socioeconomic change that is taking place and the state’s response to socioeconomic change in physical and in investment terms. Since most of my research is on Karachi, I will refer to Karachi often. But I think you will be able to identify similar trends in your own cities.

One statistic stands out regarding the megacities of Southasia. And that is the phenomenal increase in their populations, especially after the last census. This holds true of them, except for Calcutta. For instance, the Delhi population, according to the 2011 census, was between 16 and 17 million. Today, it is being claimed that it is more than 24 million. I don’t know how accurate it is, but serious writings claim that it is 24 million. Then, you have Dhaka. It was projected at 18 million for 2015. I am told by my Bangladeshi friends that it is way beyond this. They talk of 22 million today.

I would believe none of this, by the way, because the figures are so large. I wouldn’t believe it if I didn’t come from Karachi, because Karachi has grown at a phenomenal rate. It was 11 million in 1998. Today, it is about 21 million – almost double the number. Not only that, the city has expanded spatially by over 100 percent, swallowing up villages and their pasture lands and ruining the districts’ rural economy. 23 percent of this expansion is dense and consolidating. There are two points of view here. A very able Karachi planner, Farhan Anwar, has documented the terrible damage this expansion does to rural communities and how it impoverishes them, whereas my colleague Parween Rehman supported this expansion because she said it was going to benefit the poor who were coming into the city. Now you have two very pro-poor planners thinking in very different terms. I think this is a subject that needs attention.

*The only areas where the poor can find affordable land, and that too informally developed or only for occupation, is on the extreme city fringe, which is far away from work areas.*

Also in 2011 it was estimated that the total urban population of Southasia was 243 million, of which 34 percent lived in megacities. If we take today’s figures, it’s already 40 percent. I find it very difficult to believe, but evidence suggests that this is so. But the question I’ve been engaged with is why is this phenomenal increase taking place? Roland deSouza, another Karachi planner and architect, has argued that this expansion is simply because Southasian populations have grown by about 550 percent between 1941 and 2011, whereas in other countries the growth has been much less. For example, Thailand increased in about the same period by about 280 percent, and Britain by 160 percent. Roland argues that if we had increased by only 300 percent, we would be living in a very different world. So, as he says, our positive achievement is that we have produced so many children. Its simple, growth less, migration less; growth more, migration more. Percentages do not tell us the truth anymore because the figures are so large. So for one thing, I think we should talk more in terms of figures rather than percentages.

Our own research on Pakistan has established that the most important reason for increases in migration is the changes that are taking place in the socioeconomic condition of rural areas. Through a long process, which I have documented in my writings, the rural economy has transformed from a barter economy to a cash one. And in the process, the link between caste and profession, which made village self-sufficiency possible, has either vanished or is under pressure. As a result, the village no longer – in most of Pakistan – has a *lohar*, a *kumhar*, a *barai*, a *chamar*, a *raj*, etc. They have all migrated to the cities. The village today depends entirely on urban-produced goods and is no longer self-sufficient – a self-sufficiency that Gandhi admired very much. The landless labourer and the traditionally lower-caste cannot afford the city-manufactured goods, and so migration is the only option left.

The earlier migrants, made a conscious decision to migrate, to improve their livelihoods and families back home. They came from stable societies where local community governance systems functioned, even if they were questioned. The present migrants come from societies where the jirga has no moral authority – jirga is a form of inter-tribal association to sort out disputes. They come from societies where the jirga has no moral authority and the chaudhry, panchayat, the mukhi, the patel and the numberdar are all non-existent. Also, the clan and extended family is disintegrating, so there is a freedom to choose, move, and freedom from community controls and loyalties. This is the trend. It’s a very powerful trend, and it’s not going to be reversed.

For the first time, “lower castes”, such as *bheels*, *kohlis*, *meghwars* and *jogis*, who did not migrate before except as individuals now have the freedom to migrate en masse. And they do. However, due to their lack of skills, there are, in essence, large, circulating populations going back to the rural areas during the harvesting season and having no permanent residence. All this is new. In the last 15-20 years these changes have started consolidating themselves.

There, something else has happened. Most of the migrants used to work on building sites. Building roads, building buildings; mechanisation of construction projects has limited their jobs. We just studied a road-building project, a small road-building project, in which everything was mechanised. Excavation was mechanised, earth refilling was mechanised, compaction was mechanised, the laying of the tarmac was mechanised, and we asked the contractor how many people had he employed and he said 60. And we said if you didn’t have these machines how many people would you have employed? He said about a thousand. Now, this is a very big factor in demitting of jobs. This is a study that we are currently doing to see how this works and how it affects migrant labour. There are other reasons for migration as well which I will talk about later, but one very important factor is that the cities that we are talking about are becoming cities of migrants – increasingly. Local population will have less of a presence. In Karachi it’s already so.

Also, the cities to which migration is taking place have also changed. For one, they have expanded spatially and land and real estate has replaced gold as an investment. As my friend, he says, whatever happened for, “*Jo bhi sone kiliye hota tha, zamin kiliye hota hai*” (Whoever used to deal with gold now deals with land). ‘You kill, you occupy, you pressurise’, has replaced gold as an investment. It is no longer possible to squat near the city center and work areas as it was before. The Katchi Abadis of Karachi history, they are not going to be there anymore, because the land is not there. The only areas where the poor can find affordable land, and that too informally developed or only for occupation, is on the extreme city fringe, which is far away from work areas. If I look at land values in Karachi, which we’ve studied to some extent, in 1991 one square metre of land on the city’s periphery used to cost 1.7 times the daily wage at that time. Today, it is 40 times the daily wage, far away, even further away from the city than it was in 1991. So, there are other problems. The non-regularised informal settlements and even regularised ones are needed for middle-class housing whose demand has grown by 300 percent in the last decade. And this demand is likely to grow as the middle class increases.

Living on the fringe is more expensive than renting within the city. Transport costs on the fringe means expensive commuting and time, and there are also social costs. Our studies show that women cannot work on the fringe. Fathers often do not see their children because of long hours of travelling. Entertainment and recreation cannot be accessed. People are fatigued due to commuting in uncomfortable and expensive transport in terrible environmental conditions. The worst affected are women, our transport studies, which will be out soon, show that 62 percent of the women interviewed said that if they lived nearer to their places of work, they would have better job opportunities. Many said they would work, which they don’t, if they lived nearer the city, or if transport was cheaper and better. The impact on men was less. So what has happened now is that these informal settlements which were single-storey and double-storey and were near the city are now becoming five-storey, six-storey, 10-storey buildings. In Bombay it has already happened. And these are informal ownerships because this is informal high-rise development. They are becoming extremely overcrowded and they suffer from all the negative aspects of overcrowding, which are very serious. And this overcrowding is increasing, since the renters are increasing because of the rise of these multi-storey buildings. Before you had a house, you lived in it. Now, you live in a building, and your house has become six floors or ten floors. The environment, the place has changed, it is not the same place. And people have come here whom you don’t know, the street is no longer a public space, so these are the changes that are taking place.

Meera Bapat, an architect planner in Pune, she and I made some studies, she on Pune and me on Karachi, for the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights. We went back to the settlements that we knew 30 years ago, and what did we find? We found that the settlements’ infrastructure had improved, their social indicators had improved, but they had become overcrowded. And the quality of life, in spite of the improvement in infrastructure and social indicators, had declined considerably. So, apart from that, a very important aspect was the vulnerability of the renters in these settlements because the buildings are owned by musclemen and the renter can be thrown out whenever they like, and the rent can be increased whenever they want. This also has been documented in fairly great detail.

Now what has the government’s response been? I won’t go into the statistics of the gap between supply and demand, but what has the government’s response been? After the 1990s, the government’s response has been ‘go and access the market’. That has been the response, both in India and in Pakistan, except for small projects that really don’t make much of a difference. To access the market, the government has liberalised finance. But this has benefited the developers more than anyone else because they can access finance for their clients. But if individually one wants to access a loan, the requirements are such that the poor cannot access it. You need a formal job, you need an asset that you can mortgage, etc. In spite and in addition to that, these additions to the loan capital can serve only 16 percent of the demand. So to make affordable the product, the units are becoming smaller and smaller, both in the formal and in the informal sector. And they are becoming so small – 24 square metres, 30 square metres – that a family cannot live in them. Yet, you have 10-15 people living in these homes.

I was in Delhi in 2007 and some of my friends said that there is a lot of development, informal development, taking place in *Jamuna Par* so I decided to go there and take a look. My taxi driver was a sardarji, I told him “*Jamuna Par chale*”.

He said, “*Wahan kya karenge aap?*” (What will you do there?)

*Maine kaha, “Mujhe plot kharidna hai.*” So he was very excited he said he knew exactly the place where I could get a plot. And he asked me how big a plot. I said, “About 60 to 100 metres.”

He said, “*Aap usme kaise rahenge?*” (How will you live there?)

*Maine kaha, “Nahi, mere driver ke liye hai.*”

So he was very excited, and he took me there. And so, we went to an office whose signage was all in Hindi, the billboards, so I couldn’t read it; I don’t read the Devanagari script. But underneath it was written ‘Property Advisor’, so we spoke to him. He showed me the map, he showed me which was the best plot, he told me I couldn’t take any corner plots because they had already been given to those who had helped him in setting up this colony. Finally, we agreed on a price, and I said to him, “Is this scheme approved by the government?”

He said, “No, it is not an approved government scheme.”

I said, “Why should I buy a plot there?”

He said, “*Hojayega, approve hojayega na*.” (Approval will come)

I said, “I don’t believe it. I construct a house here, I have no proof of ownership?”

He said, “You have. I’m giving you the proof of ownership. I’m giving you a paper.”   
This paper, he said, is acceptable for all transactions: renting, building, etc. So I said to him that I don’t believe this. This can cause me great problems. He said, “*Tusi kyu ghabratay ho? Main hoon na.*” (Why are you flustered. I am here to help you).

Now, this is exactly how development takes place on the fringe of Karachi as well. No difference. And in the case of what I saw in 2007, it was a very huge development, enormous in size. Now you have all these informal systems of ownership, transfer, etc. They exist. They are not recognised. What do we do about them? How do we deal with them? I leave that as an open question.

The second change that I would like to talk about is in the older settlements that were built between 1970 and 1980. They have changed. When I began working the settlements, older people always used to come as the community leaders and they used to talk in a flowery – they were illiterate – they used to talk in a flowery Urdu. They used to say *janam, husoor, sain, niazmand, sharf-hasil-hoa* etc etc. Today, when you go there, there are young men who can read and write and sometimes women. They call me uncle and that too in English. So these families have changed, these settlements have changed. They are no longer purely working class settlements. Truckloads of women go to work in the factories everyday which they didn’t before. There are beauty parlours, lots of them, marriage halls, community centres and schools that the people have set up themselves. Now these settlements, their needs are less about water, electricity and sewage. Their needs are that their aspirations should be fulfilled, that they should be integrated into the middle class of the city. So they want more schools, they want vocational training, they want health, and they want culture. This is, again, something that they are fighting to get, but are not conscious that they are fighting specifically for this.

The voting patterns of these old settlements have also changed. Whereas previously they voted for progressive parties who promised them regularisation of their settlements, they now vote for the more conservative parties and increasingly have middle-class values. Unlike before, they are reluctant to join movements against evictions and/or reform. The nature of their relationship with officaldom has changed from protest to negotiation. They also constitute the largest group of voters in Karachi and are listened to. Meanwhile, shopkeepers, mandi operators and transporters have become very powerful political agents. They have not yet exercised their power, but they are in a position to do so and I don’t think it would be too different in the rest of Southasia.

Then you have new concepts that are floating around among the more radical planners and academics; the concepts of new urbanism have been promoted. And future architects and planners are being trained in them. This has also been pushed by international financial institutions and Western academia. They are telling us to have higher densities, mixed land-uses and ‘inclusive cities’. However, the three most dense cities in the world are situated in Southasia – Dhaka with a density of 4440 persons per hectare, Mumbai, with 3090 and Karachi with 2800. These densities could not be achieved without the violation of existing density laws. For instance, Karachi’s by-laws permit a maximum of 1625 persons per hectare and Mumbai’s existing density could not have been achieved if its floor-to-area ratio of 1:1.33 would have been followed. The difference between the actual density and rules and regulations is because low-income settlements have extremely high densities. In Karachi, they go up to 6000 persons per hectare, similar to that of Dharavi, while elite settlements have densities of less than 200 persons per hectare. Also, housing units on 400-2000 square metres of land in Karachi are only 2 percent of the housing stock, but they occupy 26 percent of the residential land of the city. Similar figures have been quoted for the other Southasian mega-cities. This form of development not only continues to take place but has increased due to the changes in the urban development paradigm. But the question is, is it sustainable?

Let me summarise. Mega-cities will have to find homes, transport and social services for their new arrivals who are not related to any formally structured group. They will have to cater to the needs and aspirations of the older informal settlements, which can only happen if they are protected from evictions and relocations and supported through laws, regulations and procedures in developing the social and physical infrastructure that they are already trying to develop on their own. New societal values will have to be promoted to accommodate the changes that are taking place. I will also briefly mention something else which I had not planned to, but I think I should – the nature of social change in the older settlements. The most important group in the census is between 15 and 24 years of age because it’s the present and the future. In this age group, in 1981, 39 percent of women in Karachi were married. Today, in this age group, less than 20 percent women are married; 17 percent of men were married in ’81. Eight percent of men are married today. For the first time in the history of the city, we have an overwhelming majority of unmarried adolescents and this is enough to change social structures and gender relations. And this is what is happening. Extended families, clans, settlements based on clan, they are rapidly becoming history. Also there are other factors: court marriages where a couple goes to a court to seek protection because it’s a self-willed marriage. In 1992, we had 12-15 applications per day for court marriages. In 2006, we had 250 plus applications for court marriages per day. And it has probably increased, but a time will come when it will decrease rapidly when the concept of marrying for your own free will becomes acceptable in society. More than half the applications today come from the rural areas. So I think these are important changes that are taking place which are going to affect, I feel, the future of these cities.

Concepts such as ‘it is not the business of the state to do business’, ‘cities are the engines of growth’, direct foreign investment, and concepts linking economic well-being with GDP growth have had a major impact on the national policies of Southasian countries and especially on the mega-cities.

Now, one important thing is the changing nature of official planning. We inherited the welfare state model from our colonial masters. However, we were not able to implement it except on paper due to institutional and financial constraints and a lack of political will. This is what is normally said, but I don’t think that are the only reasons. The real reason was well-entrenched anti-poor social systems and land-ownership patterns. I think this was one of the major reasons. This concept of the welfare state has been eclipsed by the neo-liberalism of the 1990s and beyond, and has been promoted aggressively both by international institutions and their local partners. Collectively, these organisations and their local partners have promoted what has come to be known as the ‘free market’ economy, which aims to remove subsidies on health, education and housing; increase taxation on utilities; sell government industrial and real estate assets to the national or international corporate sector; and remove restrictions on imports and exports. This had been done. I am not against all this, but there are other considerations.

Whole new terminologies and concepts have been developed to support this market economy. Concepts such as ‘it is not the business of the state to do business’, ‘cities are the engines of growth’, direct foreign investment, and concepts linking economic well-being with GDP growth have had a major impact on the national policies of Southasian countries and especially on the mega-cities. A whole new world, a whole new thinking has become acceptable. Now, from what I read about India, 500 Special Economic Zones have been established and corporate farming has been promoted. And according to some papers that I read, between 2010 and 2015, it was estimated that 400 million people would willingly or unwillingly be forced to move from rural to urban areas. I don’t know how correct this is but these are the figures you get in a number of papers. This is twice the population of the United Kingdom, France and Germany put together. All this has also affected agriculture. It is replacing food crops by cash crops, and in the process increasing the cost and shortage of food and making the state vulnerable to corporate sector pressures and interests. I think this was nicely summed up by a farmer in Tharparkar, who said to me, “*Pehle hum jo botay thay, khathe thay, ab jo botay hain, usko bechtay hain, aur khana kharidtey hain.*” (Before we used to eat what we grew, now we grow it to sell and then buy our food). I think this has happened and it has affected a very large section of our population.

The free market promoted political reforms and deregulations that have also had a major impact on property markets and have reshaped the politics of land development. Trading across borders in gold and contraband goods is no longer lucrative. As a result, the gangs and mafias involved in these underworld activities have become involved in the real estate business and linked up with their underworld partners.  The narcotic trade today funds much of the real estate development, at least in my city. All this has introduced an element of violence and targeted killings and kidnappings of opponents, rivals and social activists in the land and the real estate sector.

The state in almost all cases has responded to these market pressures and made land available for development through land-use conversions, new development schemes and the bulldozing of informal settlements. NGOs and CBOs who have challenged this process have faced two constraints (apart from their own internal weaknesses and culture); one is an unsympathetic media, which reports stories but not the causes, and the other is an absence of laws to prevent environmentally and socially inappropriate land conversions. Even where such laws do exist, rules, regulations and procedures and institutions to manage and implement them are often missing. As a result, courts often deliver judgments that promote inequity, poverty and social fragmentation. Media too is increasingly being controlled by a few organisations. Eighty-two percent of Karachiites have access to TV according to the census.

I will pass over this because it will take too long, and come to some issues I feel are important. What has been elaborated and said before has had a profound effect on the shape and politics of our cities. The shape that our cities are taking and the reasons behind them are the result of a powerful nexus of developers and investors (many of dubious origins, otherwise such large sums of money could not have been mobilised), compromised government institutions and bureaucrats, and politicians seeking global capital for re-shaping their cities in the image of the West – an image that is promoted (implicitly or explicitly) by the promoters of the market economy. To promote this paradigm, a new term and concept has been developed, and that is of the world-class city.

Karachi, Mumbai, Delhi, all aspire to become world-class cities in their literature. Some wish to become like Shanghai, as with Mumbai, others wish to become like Dubai, as with Karachi, although the context of Shanghai or Dubai is very far removed from them. A world-class city has been defined beautifully and also sympathetically by Mahbubur Rahman (a Bangladheshi planner) in a brilliant paper and in other literature as well. According to the world-class city agenda, the city should have iconic architecture. It should be recognised with something like the highest building or fountain in the world. It should be branded for a particular cultural, industrial or other product or happening. It should be an international event city. It should have high-rise apartments as opposed to upgraded settlements and low-rise neighborhoods. It should cater to international tourism. It should have malls as opposed to traditional markets. This is how it has been described and this is what a global city or a world-class city today is trying to achieve.

For establishing this image, poverty is pushed out of the city to the periphery and already poor-unfriendly by-laws are made even more unfriendly by permitting environmentally and socially unfriendly land-use conversions. This is driving out informal industry and businesses from poor settlements. The three most important repercussions of this agenda are: 1) that global capital increasingly determines the physical and social form of the city; 2) in the process, projects have replaced planning; and 3) land-use is now determined on the basis of land value alone and not on the basis of social and environmental considerations. Land has unashamedly become a commodity and so the poor cannot be adequately serviced. The city stands divided as never before. My city is now four cities. They speak different languages, they have different types of shopping centres. They even have different types of education institutions, and they only meet at the beach or in some parks at the city centre.

High-rise buildings, we have conclusively shown that these settlements can be upgraded to four or five storeys with the help of the residents, and could be regularised. So we do not feel the need for pulling down these settlements and re-planning them as the state insists on doing. As far as events are concerned, from what we gather, about 500,000 persons were evicted from Delhi for the preparation of the 2010 Asian Olympics [Commonwealth Games] alone. Numerous studies show how poor people become after relocation: loss of social capital, loss of physical capital, and relocations are often 20-30 kilometres – sometimes much more than that – from where they work. Children’s education is the most serious disruption that is caused. In one of the projects that we opposed, which was partially successful, 2800 students could not take their metric and pre-metric exams because of the bulldozing that took place.

The world-class cirty image is all about gentrification and it has no place in it for informal businesses and hawkers except as organised tourist attractions. The link of these hawkers and businesses with low income people (for whom they make life affordable) and with commuters is not recognised and as such, large scale evictions of informal businesses and hawkers have taken place without any compensation in all the mega-cities in Asia, of which Calcutta is perhaps the worst example. This has impoverished millions of families.

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*Projects should seek to serve the interests of the majority who live in our cities, who are the lower-middle class and the working class.*

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Then the free market economy has led to a considerable liquidity in banks and leasing companies. This has been utilised for providing loans for the purchase of cars. Karachi registered, in the year 2006-07, 606 cars per day. When I was in Delhi in 2007, I was told that the cars being registered here were 1250 per day. Bangkok was even more – 1750 cars per day. Now, there is a nexus between the automobile industry, the banking sector and the oil sector. We learnt this when we discovered that 1.6 billion USD worth of loans had been given by the Karachi banks for the purchase and leasing of cars. My friend Taseem Siddique went to the prime minister on our behalf and said, “Can’t we use this for some other purposes?” He was excited, so we had a meeting with 18 bank heads, who said no, that automobiles were the thing they would invest in, because the loans were short, they knew the clients, they were sure of returns, and housing was not something they would invest in. And one of them told me when we were leaving, he said, “Arif, you must realize that the automobile industry, the banking sector are one and the same thing, they are not two different things.” So these are the new realities with which we have to deal with.

There are some other factors that I will also just touch on. Transport: We can have all the mass transit systems. We have big plans for Karachi, but when we study them we see that the transportation for people living on the fringe, in large informal settlements, will not improve. The transport that we will be providing them will be far too expensive, unless a very major subsidy is attached to it. It is expensive because we are building on a process of build, operate and transfer, which is also a free market economy concept, whereas if we just let the Pakistan Railways manage it, the costs would be considerably less. That is one aspect I wanted to touch upon.

We have in Karachi, about 80,000 autos and we have an additional 60,000 of what we call Qingqis – these are six-seater motorcycle rickshaws. The Karachiites love them, they find them cheaper, women find them safer, and the government wishes to ban them and they did ban them, but they are still there because the High Court of Sindh decided that they are essential for the people. Now the problem is, what do we do with them, because there is so much official and middle-class antagonism against them. Even though they have a right now to function, the police does everything possible to limit their movement. The other way in which the transport issue is being tackled is by motorbikes. In 2004, we had 400,000 motorbikes, while today we have 1.7 million motorbikes. And all surveys show – we had surveys done at bus stops – everybody wants motorbikes. And if we reduce the price to 20,000 rupees instead of 32,000 rupees, I don’t think we will need a mass transit system, or any expansion of a mass transit system. Now the question is, do we promote these forms of movement, these forms of transport? It is a serious discussion which we have been trying to indulge in, so should they be promoted?

I don’t know any cities that have produced an alternative vision for the city. There has been a lot of writing on ‘what should be or should not be’, but a vision that is acceptable or seriously pursued has not been presented. When the Karachi Special Development Plan was being made, I was a member of one of the committees, and we said, “Let’s not have this vision of world-class city, but let us have a vision of a pedestrian and commuter-friendly city.” It would change everything; the whole manner of planning would change if such a vision was accepted. But, one of the members of the Asian Development Bank who was a member of the meeting said, “With this vision, nobody would invest any money in the city.” So, that was out.

The other serious thing is projects replacing planning. Karachi for the foreseeable future will only have projects. There is going to be no serious planning, and planning will be overtaken by projects. Accepting this, I tried to promote some principles on the basis of which projects could be judged and/or modified. These principles are: One, projects should not damage the ecology of the region in which the city is located; two, projects should, as a priority, seek to serve the interests of the majority who live in our cities, who are the lower-middle class and the working class; Three, projects should decide land-use on the basis of social and environmental considerations and not on the basis of land value alone. And four, projects should protect the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the communities that live in them. In my opinion, this would produce much better projects and improve people’s lives. But again, at the same meeting, the same gentleman responded, “With your four points, there would be no projects.” So that is another issue which needs to be taken into consideration.

However, to finish, the question is whether the megalomania and opportunism of politicians and planners will accept a new and more humane paradigm that curtails their profits and decommoditises land. I think that this is a very fundamental issue. I do not think that they will unless they are pressurised by city wide networks armed with alternative research and an alternative vision. In this, I think professional education can play a very important role. Right now, professional education is increasingly becoming pro-neoliberal in the bad sense of the word. I have often thought that it might help if graduating architects, planners and engineers could take an oath similar to those of doctors, and if they did not follow the terms of the oath, their names be removed from the list of practicing professionals.

In 1983, after evaluating an important urban renewal project which created poverty and environmental degradation, I made a pledge in writing. I will just quote from that. I wrote, “I will not do projects that will irreparably damage the ecology and environment of the area in which they are located. I will not do projects that increase poverty, dislocate people and destroy the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of communities that live in the city. I will not do projects that destroy multi-class space and violate building by-laws and zoning regulations. And I will always object to insensitive projects that do all this, provided I can offer viable alternatives.” Well I have tried to keep my promise, except that I have violated building rules and regulations, but they were bad ones. But I have put this before the leaders of the architectural community many times, “Why don’t we have such an oath?” And one of the architects answered, he said to me, ‘*Arif bhai, hum toh bazaar meh bhettain hai*.’ (Arif, we are part of a market). And this is a reality that we have to take into consideration when discussing a new paradigm.

Thank you so much.

*~* *Arif Hasan is an urban philosopher and social researcher based in Karachi. He has been involved with the Orangi Pilot Project since 1982, and is the founding Chairman of the Urban Resource Centre.*

*\* This is an edited transcript of the Himal Lecture delivered at the India International Centre, New Delhi on 7 November 2014. Watch the video of the lecture* [*here*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QMAwLGQEAM)*.*

\* This article also appears in Himal Magazine.