Sharif: Managed Cities Are Key To Driving Sustainable Development

Maimunah Mohd Sharif, a Muslim Technocrat, is now the head of UN-Habitat and is chairwoman of the World Urban Forum in Kuala Lumpur. As such, she is now in charge of the UN's New Urban Agenda that was produced at Habitat-III. ⬜ TN Editor

The head of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) said on Wednesday that a week-long conference on sustainable urban development that kicked off Wednesday in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, will open a "global conversation about our cities and human settlements."

"With its genuine openness and inclusive nature, the World Urban Forum (WUF9) is unique on the United Nations conference circuit," said Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director of UN-Habitat in her remarks to the opening of the Forum, which runs through Saturday, 13

January.

"It is a chance for stakeholders from all over the world – from ministers, local government and urban planners, to civil society groups, the private sector, academia and the media – to contribute to the global conversation about our cities and human settlements," she added.

Ms. Sharif called WUF9 a platform where people from all walks of life share their experience of finding homes, jobs and lives in urban spaces around the world and a chance for some of the world's most marginalized to highlight their experiences in being denied some of the advantages cities pose.

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For current and future partners, the UN-Habitat chief saw the Forum as an opportunity to showcase the innovative ideas and solutions to challenges being confronted in urban and rural human settlements – and to learn from experts in the field.

Ms. Sharif maintained that WUF9 is "the ideal platform to debate the contribution that positive urban development makes to delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goal 11, and the New Urban Agenda," which was adopted in 2016 by the UN conference known as Habitat III.

Recent debates and studies have indeed acknowledged that sustainable urbanization is an essential tool for addressing the global challenges of poverty, exclusion, conflict and climate change.

"The New Urban Agenda comes at a critical moment, when for the first time in history over half of the world's population is residing in cities," she said, which, if planned and managed well, can be "the main tool for sustainable development and a solution to many of the challenges our planet is facing today."

WUF9 is the first major milestone after the adoption of the New Urban Agenda, which lays out the vision for future cities based on the science of urban development providing tools in crucial areas.

Barely three weeks into her tenure as the UN-Habitat chief, Ms. Sharif said it is "an honour and a privilege" that the Forum, which is held every two years in different parts of the world, was being hosted in her native Malaysia, saying "Kuala Lumpur will have the chance to showcase some of its own urban innovations."

She concluded her statement with the assertion that she looked forward to joining "the global conversation on promoting socially, economically and environmentally sustainable cities for all."

Read full story here...

World Urban Forum in Kuala Lumpur To Debate Sustainability

Dubbed "Cities 2030, Cities for All: Implementing the New Urban

Agenda", something is off-kilter at the U.N. The U.N. is increasingly being dominated by Islamic thought and personnel; this key forum is being held in a predominately Islamic nation and region; leading UN Habitat and presiding over the conference is Maimunah Mohd Sharif, a Muslim bureaucrat. Are global cities of the future to be subsumed by the Islamic world? ⬚ TN Editor

The 9th World Urban Forum (WUF9), in Kuala Lumpur from Feb 7 to 13, is described by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/210 as the "first session" to focus on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA). This was adopted by the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador.

About 25,000 participants are expected at the event at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre.

Norliza Hashim, chief executive officer of Urbanice Malaysia, an urban think tank, said the forum would hold more than 500 events that included assemblies, plenary sessions, policy dialogues, high-level roundtable, training sessions and networking events.

The WUF9 portal states that NUA comes at a critical moment in history because more than half of the world's population live in cities. The theme is "Cities 2030, Cities for All: Implementing the New Urban Agenda".

The goal is to "mobilise urban actors" in national governments, local governments, civil society, private sector and academia to share their knowledge and offer innovative and long-lasting solutions to achieve sustainable urban development, and at the same time, encourage stakeholders to continue monitoring the implementation of NUA and to forge strong "multi-stakeholder partnerships".

The topics during the special sessions, which are of interest to my colleagues (lawyers and urban planners in this country), include the following:

- SECURITY of tenure, land market and segregation;
- LEVERAGING diversity and culture, shaping cities for all;
- URBAN-RURAL linkages;

- HOUSING at the centre;
- INFORMAL settlements and slum upgrading;
- AFFORDABLE housing for all;
- LOW carbon and energy-efficient cities;
- URBAN safety and accessibility;
- CREATIVE investment and financing mechanism for local governments; and,
- CIVIC engagement and participation.

The topics and issues chosen for deliberation in the dialogues and roundtable will demand that professionals in urban planning revisit the national structural framework (policies, laws, regulations, guidelines and standard practices) to determine whether, in the current state, they can facilitate and advance the goals of NUA, or they must be revised, reformed, strengthened or simplified.

For our urban planners, local government leaders and administrators, they will have to determine whether our legal framework (such as Act 171, Act 172, Act 133 and many others) are in good shape or must be revamped if NUA is to be implemented smoothly.

All the three statutes are more than four decades old.

Colleagues in the legal profession and the academia used to remind me that while our corporate law has been transformed under the new Companies Act 2016 (Act 777), the strata law updated under Act A1450 and Act 757 (Strata Management Act 2013), and the property law overhauled under Act A1415 (National Land Code (Amendment) Act 2016), the three abovementioned statues have not been reformed.

Read full story here...

UN-Habitat's First Muslim Leader To Preside Over World Urban Forum In Malaysia

Underscoring the compatibility between Islam and the UN's New Urban Agenda, a key component of Sustainable Development, a Muslim has been appointed to head the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, also known as UN Habitat. ⬚ TN Editor

Next month's ninth World Urban Forum in Kuala Lumpur will be a coming out event for **Maimunah Mohd Sharif**, one of the most prominent mayors in Malaysia — not because she will be showcasing her home municipality of Penang Island, but because she will be taking the helm of UN-Habitat, the United Nations' lead agency on urban issues.

In December, UN Secretary-General António Guterres appointed Sharif, who had served just six months as mayor of Penang Island, an island city popular for its historic district with a population of 738,500. She was confirmed unanimously by the UN General Assembly. Sharif will be the

first Asian, first Muslim, and second woman to lead the Nairobi-based agency.

The 56-year-old married mother of two holds a Bachelor of Science in town planning studies from the University of Wales Institutes of Science and Technology and a Master of Science in planning studies from the University of Science, Malaysia.

A career town planner, she began working in the trenches of Penang Island's Municipal Council in 1985. In 2003, she was promoted to director of planning and development, where she oversaw island-wide planning and urban renewal schemes for the island's largest settlement, George Town. And in 2009, she became the first general manager of George Town World Heritage Incorporated, an entity formed to oversee the UNESCO World Heritage site at the historic colonial port, established in 2008.

Last year, she was appointed mayor by the state government — local elections were suspended in 1965 — but she barely had time to settle into that role before being confirming to her international appointment on Dec. 22.

Sharif described the new position, for which she was headhunted and did not apply, as "bittersweet" because it will mean leaving behind the plans she had made for Penang Island. "But it is a positive thing and an opportunity for me to work under the UN flag and deal with global issues," she told the Malaysia Star.

In the weeks since her appointment, colleagues and peers from across the globe consulted by Next City have showered her with praise, calling her "a confident, reliable leader" and "very warm and highly personable."

"Maimunah is a true local soul," says United Cities and Local Governments Secretary-General Emilia Saiz. "She has important technical skills and has worked in the field on public space, resilience and all the challenges that cities need to face. She is an activist and true champion on the links between the global goals and the local actions."

Several former colleagues pointed to the significance of appointing a woman to the leadership role. Cecilia Ng from the Penang Women's Development Corporation called Sharif "a feisty person and very committed to her job" when the two worked together to establish a gender-responsive budget in the Penang town of Seberang Jaya in the early 2010s.

Read full story here…

Pipe Dreams? Forget Tiny Houses, Eight Foot Concrete

Tubes Might Solve The Housing Crisis

Affording just 100 square feet for up to two people, these concrete pipes would be better suited for prison construction. The Technocrat mind who conceived and designed this is in perfect harmony with the UN's 2030 Agenda and New Urban Agenda. ⬜ TN Editor

A Hong Kong architect has invented what he believed to be the solution of overcrowded cities by turning concrete water pipes into tiny homes.

The OPod Tube Housing system aims to re-purpose concrete tubes measuring just over eight feet in diameter, and turn them into 'micro-homes' with 100 square feet of living space.

It is the brainchild of architect James Law of James Law Cybertecture who designed the build as a possible solution to the lack of both space and affordable housing in Hong Kong.

Step into my pod: The OPods are created out of re-purposed concrete water pipes that measure a little over eight feet in diameter and are turned into homes for one to two people. Snug and affordable: The 'main room' of the OPod is a front room with a sofa that can be converted into a bed at night.

Pod up: This prototype show the two parts of the pods, the front room/bedroom, and another with strange and a bathroom

With a population of 6,690 people per square kilometer in 2014, Hong Kong has one of the most competitive real estate markets in the world.

The tubes are designed to accommodate one or two people and are equipped with the standard amenities, including a living room with a bench that converts into a bed, a mini-fridge, a bathroom, a shower and plenty of storage space for clothes and personal items.

According to Mr Law, the inspiration behind the tiny tube homes is practical, both for young people looking for homes as well as city

governments trying to provide affordable options.

Saving space: In a city like Hong Kong which is extremely overcrowded, the OPod inventors claim can solve this issue

Although the structures are far from being lightweight at 22 tons a-piece, they require little in terms of installation and can be easily secured to one another, which reduces installation costs.

Read full story here...

Mechelen Declaration: Cities Adopt UN Declaration for Global Compact on Migration

Cities are jockeying for more autonomous control within the nation-state, claiming that all societies will be multicultural, multi-ethnic and

multi-lingual. Peter Sutherland, United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration and Development, once stated that multiculturalism is the only path to implement Sustainable Development. ⬥ TN Editor

Over 50 cities from Europe, North, Central and South America, Asia and Africa were represented at the Global Conference on Cities and Migration, which sought to create a more positive narrative on migration from the perspective of local and regional authorities. The outcome of the Conference – the Mechelen Declaration – sought to capture the vision of mayors and governors of regional and local governments with regard to cities and migration.

The Global Conference on Cities and Migration took place from 16-17 November 2017, in Mechelen, Belgium. The event was organized by Belgium's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and UN-Habitat. The meeting consolidated local governments' contributions to developing a Global Compact on Migration, and reviewed progress in implementing the migration-related commitments of Habitat III, ahead of the intergovernmental stocktaking meeting for the Global Compact on Migration, convening in December 2017, and the 9th World Urban Forum (WUF 9), convening in February 2018.

The Declaration builds on the SDGs, the New Urban Agenda and the New York Declaration on Migrants and Refugees. In an annex, it presents the mayors and leaders' actionable commitments, means of implementation, and a monitoring and evaluation mechanism, which serves as the basis for the first follow-up and review of the migration-related commitments included in the New Urban Agenda. The document recognizes the importance of a community-driven approach to local urban governance that benefits communities of origin, transit, and destination as well as migrants, refugees, returnees and internally displaced people (IDPs).

The Declaration calls on Member States to consider the following policy gaps in the process for the Global Compact on Migration:

- recognize the support required for cities of origin, transit and return, as well as host destination cities;
- treat local and regional governments as part of their nation-state, and not external or non-governmental stakeholders;
- set up coordination mechanisms to enable local and regional governments to contribute to migration policymaking;
- enable integrated urban solutions that are inclusive;
- ensure the roles and responsibilities of local, regional and national governments on migration are clear;
- ensure that the allocation of resources to local and regional authorities, as well as service provision, is done in a manner proportional to the growth of the population;
- enhance the capacity for disaggregated local level data-collection and analysis, including for assessment reports and policymaking;
- recognize and provide support to local and regional governments, in "their joint responsibility with the state" to ensure safety and access to justice for all.

The document was submitted to Louise Arbour, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for International Migration, and to the co-facilitators of the process for the Global Compact on Migration. The mayors, local and regional leaders also called on the next World Council of UCLG to endorse and promote the Mechelen Declaration. The next UCLG World Council will take place from 6-9 December 2017, in Hangzhou, China.

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UN Habitat Chief: 'Rethink Ways To Govern Cities'

UN Technocrats now suggest that urbanites should be 'open minded' and dream up 'innovative solutions' to create the cities of the future. This is nonsense, however, because the decisions have already been made and models have already been built. Technocrats only want to offer a distant hope of citizen participation. ⬜ TN Editor

Marking World Cities Day, a senior United Nations official on Tuesday spotlighted the need to find innovate ways to govern cities, as more than half of the world's population live in urban areas.

"The scope and speed at which people access information and interact among themselves is unprecedented in history, and institutions need to react to these new ways to exercise citizenship," said Joan Clos, the head of the UN Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat), in his message for the Day, whose theme this year is 'Innovative Governance, Open Cities.'

"We should not fear innovation," he stressed.

The adoption of the New Urban Agenda in 2016 at the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, widely referred to as Habitat III, has given a vision on how to build, plan and manage cities in a more inclusive, safe, resilient, inclusive and sustainable way.

Mr. Clos said that the use of technology, like crowd-sourcing, can help generate ideas and create fresh approaches to governance and policy-making.

"If we open our minds to the possibilities and opportunities open government present, it will contribute significantly to generating a better world for people, planet and prosperity," he said.

Read full story here...

Propaganda: UN Urges Media To Drive Narratives On Its New Urban Agenda

The UN's New Urban Agenda has little direct appeal to the masses, so the logical Technocrat solution is to manipulate the media into selling it for them. Looking beyond the Utopian promises, the UN's policies will establish a global Technocracy and Scientific Dictatorship. ⁂ TN Editor
Following Habitat III, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, which took place in Quito Ecuador 2016, and the emerging need to further build the capacity of the media in reporting Housing and sustainable urban development, the UN Information Centre (UNIC) Lagos and the UN-Habitat Nigeria have organised a Media Workshop on Post-Habitat III Conference/ New Urban Agenda.

Speaking on the role of the media in the New Urban Agenda, the National Information Officer of UNIC, Oluseyi Soremekun, called on the media to drive the new narratives about urban development in Nigeria by getting acquainted with the New Urban Agenda (NUA) as well as relevant policies and plans of the government on housing and urban development.

'If you are not conversant with the necessary NUA frameworks; the National Housing Policy as well as other National Plans, you cannot hold the government accountable to its commitment to a new urban agenda that will redress the way cities and human settlements are planned, financed, developed, governed and managed. He noted.

'Media should give prominence to the issues of sustainable housing, urban development and slum upgrading. Soremekun said, 'Media should rise above sensationalising and politicising issues of urban development. Rather, they should interrogate the existing housing and urban development policy and plan and juxtapose these with government actions.

The workshop held on Thursday 26 October 2017 in Abuja, and attended by twenty-five participants from the media, Federal Ministry of Power, Works and Housing (FMPWH) and the UN system, was aimed at strengthening awareness among journalists and media professionals of the challenges of urbanisation and the global efforts to address them, notably the outcomes of the Habitat III conference in Quito; developing the capacity of journalists to engage constructively with policy makers, professionals and government functionaries to actively follow-up on implementation of the New Urban Agenda; and facilitating citizens' participation in the New Urban Agenda.

In his presentation, the Program Manager of UN-Habitat Nigeria, Mr Kabir Yari explained that the New Urban Agenda is an action-oriented document which sets global standards of achievement in sustainable urban development, rethinking the way we build, manage, and live in cities through cooperation with all levels of government, relevant stakeholders, and other urban actors such as the private sector.

He noted that the agenda also 'provides the underpinning for actions to address climate change and reaffirms our global commitment to sustainable urban development as a critical step for realizing sustainable development in an integrated and coordinated manner."

Mr Yari added that the shared vision and commitments include: 'Cities and human settlements must be for every one; referred as the 'right to the city. It entails equal rights including the right to adequate housing; gender equality, basic urban services etc.; Urban equity and inclusiveness leaving no one behind and addressing issues of poverty, deprivation in cities, socio-economic and cultural diversity.

Discussing the 'Challenges and Response to Urbanisation in Nigeria, the Director of Urban & Regional Development (URD) Department, Federal Ministry of Power, Works and Housing (FMPWH), Mr L. C. Anikamadu, explained that 'Nigeria boasts of more than ten regional centres which have established status of 'millionaire cities'. In addition, she has several other fast growing population centres which have assumed very strong urban identity due to administrative, commercial, ethnic, transport connectivity and other intrinsic peculiarities.

Mr Anikamadu noted that as urbanization creates hordes of cities and townships, several intimidating challenges of different shades follow in its wake. 'Perhaps most significantly, urbanization has created a huge class of 'urban poor' who live in unimaginable conditions, abject misery and lack of basic necessities of life. He added.

Read full story here...

Dubai Vs. Smart City – The Future Of Happiness?

Technocrats claim that convenience makes you happy, and in Dubai, its Smart City technology makes everything convenient. However, Dubai is an Islamic dictatorship, where creating a Smart City bypasses all direct input from citizens who must live under it. Scientific Dictatorship promises the moon, but the realization of it will be a dark moon rising, indeed. ⁂ TN Editor

Every day Dubai is one step closer to becoming a fully-fledged smart

city, as an increasing number of devices become connected, and as governments continue to implement projects with services that strip away the old ways of getting things done. Our lives are becoming more intertwined with smart solutions that save us time and effort on administrative tasks, allowing us to focus on things that make us happy. It's no surprise then that the smarter a city is, the happier its residents are.

Over the last decade we have experienced the proliferation of digital connectivity and the Internet of Things (IoT), both of which have given smart cities a whole new meaning, creating endless possibilities for citizens to lead more convenient lives. According to research firm IHS Technology, smartphones and tablets make up more than 80% of connected devices in the Middle East and Africa and their adoption is set to grow from 133 million devices in 2014 to 598 million in 2018, a huge increase in only four years!

Gulf nations have gained increased visibility in the development of smart cities globally, with Dubai emerging as the leading smart city in the region. The Emirate has made great strides in the short period of roughly a decade since the launch of its eGovernment in 1999.

The smart city is a new playing field where authorities are able to link individuals to public organisations through electronic and mobile governments. Smart cities enable the transformation of public services and in turn enhance the convenience for citizens. One of the most important outcomes of cities going smart is that digitisation of governments, which enables the provision of services to a wide geographical coverage of the population in a citizen-friendly manner. eGovernment and mGovernment services make services more seamless and accessible to the public – especially citizens who are isolated or have reduced mobility. Although citizens have always been players in the system, with digital technology they are now the focal point and have the means to be involved and take control. Consequently, smart governments make life easier and citizen-centric, and residents will be appreciative that authorities do not ask for data which they already have in their possession; that personal data are under the control of citizens to ensure transparency and privacy; and that they can access public

services 24/7.

Shaped by the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and ruler of Dubai, the Smart Dubai initiative is based on the notion that cities should be designed in a way to maximize the happiness of its residents and visitors by embracing technology innovation. This initiative is transforming the Emirate into a smart city, and over the past three years Dubai has launched an impressive 121 smart initiatives and 1,129 smart services.

For example, app-based solutions such as DubaiNow's one-tap bill payment makes payments easier, while infrastructure enhancements such as the Smart Grid by the Dubai Water and Electricity Authority leads to energy and cost savings. Smart parking services from Roads and Transport Authority save commuter's time and additionally the RTA's Nol Card allows users to pay for taxi, bus and metro fares with ease. Furthermore, Dubai residents can simply scan their Emirates ID cards at airport eGates for easy passage when travelling instead of having to queue up at immigration.

More recently in April, His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and Chairman of the Dubai Executive Council launched the next phase in Dubai's smart transformation which aims to make Dubai's Government entirely paperless by 2021. Building on the Emirate's many achievements to-date, the Dubai Government plans to continue deploying and integrating technology into its services to make residents and visitors happy.

As Dubai's population is projected to double over the next 14 years, reaching five million by 2030, an efficient and frictionless city is essential for a thriving future and explains why being a smart city is high on the national agenda. Seeing that enhanced services make life more streamlined and in turn easier, safer and more impactful for everyone, smart technology is the ultimate tool to maximise happiness — where we can spend time doing things we love, ultimately resulting in increased happiness.

That said, the convenience of smart cities brings risks, as data security and privacy become a concern. Trust and security are key factors that must be woven into the fabric of smart cities for residents and visitors to be able to reap the full benefits. Smart government and public solutions, such as the ones already employed in Dubai only work when we trust those who design the technologies and services we rely on to keep our data and identities safe.

Security therefore must be kept in the forefront of everyone's minds if smart cities are truly to bring long-term happiness. There are three pillars that both the private sector and government partners must keep in mind if they wish to work towards achieving the full potential of Dubai Smart City initiative:

Read full story here...

Sweden's Model Urban Policy

Still Can't Control 'Unsustainable Consumption'

Sweden is headed toward direct Technocracy and leads Europe in New Urban Agenda policies, but it has not curtailed unsustainable consumption. Who decides what is sustainable consumption or not? The same Technocrats who shoved Technocracy down their throat in the first place. ⁜ TN Editor

Following the long Swedish summer holidays, Stockholm has been slowly coming back to life with a series of cultural and sustainability festivals. The end of August saw the city host the Stockholm Act, including talks, cultural events and seminars on how Sweden can deliver on international sustainability goals. On the heels of that was World Water Week, a globally renowned forum attracting researchers and policymakers from top international institutions dealing with water and sustainability.

Stockholm also has been joined by cities such as Gothenburg and Umeå, in the country's north, in driving sustainability. All three have been national winners of WWF's One Planet City Challenge, a global initiative designed to highlight cities that are implementing sustainable, low-carbon solutions and strategies to accelerate the global transition to renewable energy. In addition, Gothenburg has built a reputation around pioneering green bonds and its state-of-the-art public transport system, while Umeå has focused on integrated planning, measuring quality of life linked with sustainability.

Swedish cities thus appear to be global models of sustainability. Indeed, the urban districts of Hammaerby Sjöstad in Stockholm and Western Harbour in Malmö regularly attract throngs of urban planners from the world over, eager to learn or mimic the innovative and high-tech sustainability efforts underway in these cities.

Those efforts are finding parallel at the national level, too. Sweden's burgeoning reputation for urban sustainability has often been reinforced by the repeated claim at the national level that the country has

successfully managed to decouple economic growth from its emissions performance.

But what about the country's "ecological footprint"? This measure takes into account consumption-based emissions from the goods and services consumed by Swedes but that may be produced abroad. In fact, it tells a far different story.
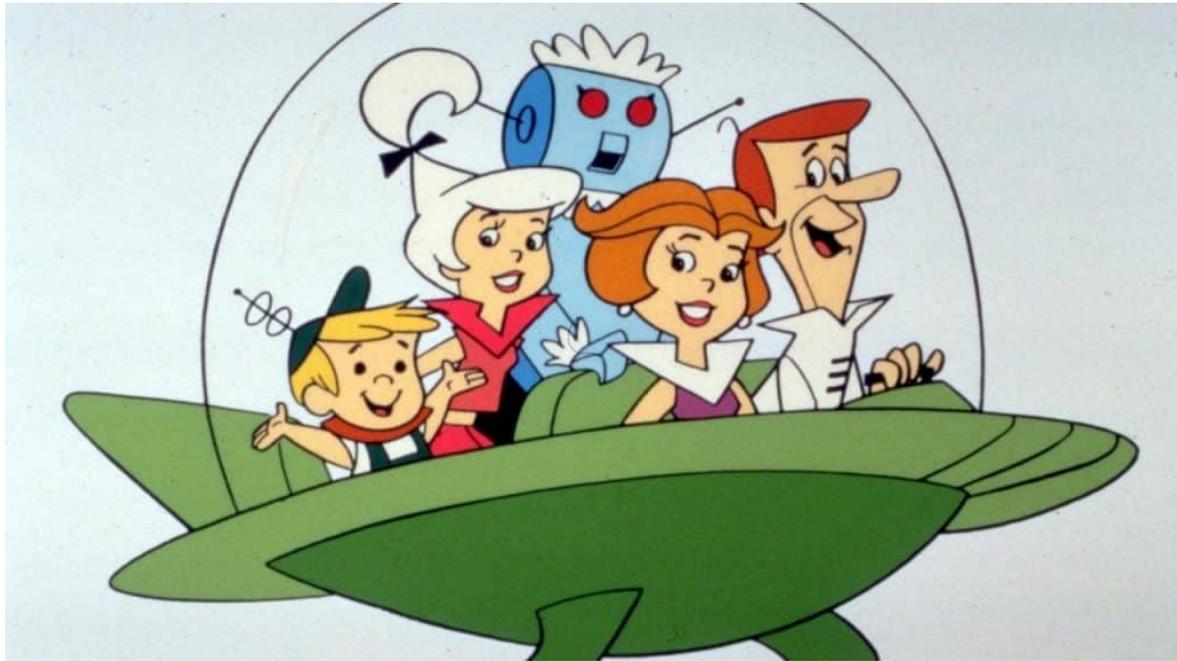
As set out in WWF's latest Living Planet Report, Sweden ranks among the worst such performers, along with Australia, the United States and the UAE. Today, the average Swede uses the equivalent of four times the planet's per-person capacity — and most of this footprint stems from activities taking place in the country's cities.

Containing 'spillover'

But a new process is currently unfolding that could offer a key opportunity to rethink how Sweden's cities function — even, potentially, pushing back on this trend of unsustainable consumption.

The government is formulating the country's first-ever national urban policy. In part, this is seen as a means to cement the country's implementation of the New Urban Agenda, the global agreement on sustainable cities adopted last year to support the U. N.'s broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Read full story here…

The Infinite Suburb Is An Academic Joke

Sustainable Development, aka Technocracy, is an unworkable economic model that will self-destruct as its proponents foolishly worship at the alter of Utopia. I cannot find a single legitimate economist who has done a deep analysis on Technocracy and concluded that Utopia has finally arrived. It has not, will not, cannot. ⬜ TN Editor

The elite graduate schools of urban planning have yet another new vision of the future. Lately, they see a new-and-improved suburbia—based on self-driving electric cars, deliveries by "drones deliveries at your doorstep," and "teardrop-shaped one-way roads" (otherwise known as cul-de-sacs)—as the coming sure thing. It sounds suspiciously like yesterday's tomorrow, the George Jetson utopia that has been the stock-in-trade of half-baked futurism for decades. It may be obvious that for some time now we have lived in a reality-optional culture, and it's vividly on display in the cavalcade of techno-narcissism that passes for thinking these days in academia.

Exhibit A is an essay that appeared last month in *The New York Times Magazine* titled "The Suburb of the Future is Almost Here," by Alan M. Berger of the MIT urban design faculty and author of the book *Infinite*

Suburbia—on the face of it a perfectly inane notion. The subtitle of his *Times Magazine* piece argued that "Millennials want a different kind of suburban development that is smart, efficient, and sustainable."

Note the trio of clichés at the end, borrowed from the lexicon of the advertising industry. "Smart" is a meaningless anodyne that replaces the worn out tropes "deluxe," "super," "limited edition," and so on. It's simply meant to tweak the reader's status consciousness. Who wants to be dumb?

"Efficient" and "sustainable" are actually at odds. The combo ought to ring an alarm bell for anyone tasked with designing human habitats. Do you know what "efficient" gets you in terms of ecology? Monocultures, such as GMO corn grown on sterile soil mediums jacked with petroleum-based fertilizers, herbicides, and fast-depleting fossil aquifer water. It's a method that is very efficient for producing corn flakes and Cheez Doodles, but has poor prospects for continuing further into this century—as does conventional suburban sprawl, as we've known it. Efficiency in ecological terms beats a path straight to entropy and death.

Real successful ecologies, on the other hand, are the opposite of efficient. They are deeply redundant. They are rich in diverse species and functions, many of which overlap and duplicate, so that a problem with one failed part or one function doesn't defeat the whole system. This redundancy is what makes them resilient and sustainable. Swamps, prairies, and hardwood forests are rich and sustainable ecologies. Monocultures, such as agri-biz style corn crops and "big box" retail monopolies are not sustainable and they're certainly not even ecologies, just temporary artifacts of finance and engineering. What would America do if Walmart went out of business? (And don't underestimate the possibility as geopolitical tension and conflict undermine global supply lines.)

Suburbia of the American type is composed of monocultures: residential, commercial, industrial, connected by the circulatory system of cars. Suburbia is not a sustainable human ecology. Among other weaknesses, it is fatally prone to Liebig's "law of the minimum," which states that the overall health of a system depends on the amount of the scarcest of the

essential resources that is available to it. This ought to be self-evident to an urbanist, who must *ipso facto* be a kind of ecologist.

Yet techno-narcissists such as MIT's Berger take it as axiomatic that innovation of-and-by itself can overcome all natural limits on a planet with finite resources. They assume the new-and-improved suburbs will continue to run on cars, only now they will be driverless and electric, and everything in their paradigm follows from that.

I don't think so. Like it or not, the human race has not yet found a replacement for fossil fuels, especially oil, which has been the foundation of techno-industrial economies for a hundred years, and it is getting a little late in the game to imagine an orderly segue to some as-yet-undiscovered energy regime.

By the way, electricity is not an energy source. It is just a carrier of energy generated in power plants. We have produced large quantities of it at the grand scale using fossil fuels, hydropower, and nuclear fission (which is dependent on fossil fuels to operate). And, by the way, all of our nuclear power plants are nearing the end of their design life, with no plans or prospects for them to be replaced by new ones. We have maxed out on potential hydroelectric sites and the existing big ones are silting up, which will take them out of service inside of this century.

Electricity can also be produced by solar cells and wind turbines, but at nowhere near the scale necessary, on their own, for running contemporary American life. The conceit that we can power suburbia, the interstate highway system, truck-based distribution networks, commercial aviation, the U.S. military, and Walt Disney World on anything besides fossil fuels is going to leave a lot of people very disappointed.

The truth is that we have been running all this stuff on an extravagant ramp-up of debt for at least a decade to compensate for the troubles that exist in the oil industry, oil being the primary and indispensable resource for our way of life. These troubles are often lumped under the rubric *peak oil*, but the core of the trouble must be seen a little differently: namely, a steep decline in the Energy Return on Investment

(EROI) across the oil industry. The phrase might seem abstruse on the face of it. It means simply that it is becoming uneconomical to extract oil from the ground, even with the so-called miracle of "fracking" shale oil deposits. It doesn't pay for itself, and the EROI is still headed further down.

In the 1930s, the oil industry could get 100 barrels of oil for every barrel of oil in energy they put into production. Drilling on the Texas prairie was like slipping a straw in a milkshake and the oil gushed out of the ground under its own pressure. Today, those old wells are far into depletion and we're left with unconventional oil. Horizontal drilling and fracking into shale is enormously more expensive to carry out, and offshore deepwater drilling that requires a $100 million floating oil platform is nothing like slipping a straw into a milkshake. They have to go down a mile or more beneath the surface and then another mile into the undersea rock. It's very expensive and dangerous. (Remember the BP Deepwater Horizon blowout of 2010?)

The aggregate ratio of *oil-out-for-energy-in* these days is 17 to 1, and for shale oil it's more like 5 to 1. You cannot run industrial civilizations at those EROI ratios. Thirty to one is probably the minimum. And you can't run renewable alternative energy systems without an underlying support platform of fossil fuels. The implacable reality of this dynamic has yet to sink in at the graduate-school fantasy factories.

The world's major oil companies are cannibalizing themselves to stay in business, with balance sheets cratering, and next-to-zero new oil fields being discovered. The shale oil producers haven't made a net dime since the project got ramped up around 2005. Their activities have been financed on junk lending made possible by arbitrages on the near-zero Fed fund rate, itself an historical abnormality. The shale-oil drillers are producing all out to service their loans, and have thus driven down oil prices, negating their profit. Low oil prices are not the sign of a healthy industry but of a failing industrial economy, the latter currently expressing itself in a sinking middle class and the election of Donald Trump.

All the techno-grandiose wishful thinking in the world does not alter this

reality. The intelligent conclusion from all this ought to be obvious: Restructuring the American living arrangement to something other than "infinite" suburban sprawl based on limitless car dependency.

As it happens, the New Urbanist movement recognized this dynamic beginning in the early 1990s and proposed a return to traditional walkable neighborhoods, towns, and cities as the remedy. It has been a fairly successful reform effort, with hundreds of municipal land-use codes rewritten to avert the inevitable suburban sprawl mandates of the old codes. The movement also produced hundreds of new town projects all over the country to demonstrate that good urbanism was possible in new construction, as well as downtown makeovers in places earlier left for dead like Providence, Rhode Island, and Newburgh, New York.

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