

Book Review

Green Urbanism- The Making of an Ecological Capital

*A Review of: Cities in Transformation –
Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize*

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During the 60s the Brazilian City of Curitiba was plagued by seasonal flooding, urban sprawl and uncontrollable pollution caused by heavy inner city traffic. It was time for urgent action. And so the city architect and urban planner Dr. Jaime Lerner, who was later to become the City Mayor and Governor of the State of Parana, conceived of a master plan designed to focus on exactly those pressure points that required what he termed “urban acupuncture.”

This master plan for city transformation making Curitiba the “Ecological Capital of Brazil” was adopted in 1966 even before the term sustainability was even coined as a slogan and aim for urban development. Overcoming the initial opposition of merchants the city administrators embarked on an effective project of pedestrianisation , and creating an integrated bus rapid transport network. Another element in solving the city’s pollution problem was the implementation in the 80s of a city wide waste recycling program, raising the recycling rate to 85%, one of the highest in the world.

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Equally ground breaking was the ambitious plan for flood control involving the construction of an expansive network of viaducts and turning exposed areas into water parks easily accommodating rising water levels during the rainy season. Another element in the green urbanism campaign was the restoration and new construction of 27 city parks, a number of them dedicated to the city's immigration groups as recreation areas and social meeting places. Through this plan the area of green urban spaces rose from 0.5 sq. miles to 50 sq. miles. In addition a Rural Village plan was implemented to upgrade and provide new housing for low-income families.

The amazing story of the transformation of Curitiba is just one of many accounts of how cities worldwide have faced environmental and social challenges found in the new book "Cities in Transformation- Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize" published by the Urban Redevelopment Authority, Singapore at Edition Didier Millet, Singapore 2012, ISBN 978-981-4385-14-5.

This fact filled volume telling the stories of the Prize Laureate cities of New York and Bilbao together with the "special mention" cities of Ahmedabad, Brisbane, Copenhagen, Malmoe, Vancouver, Melbourne, Khayelitsha, Curitiba and Delhi should find its way into the bookshelves and even better desks of every city planner as a source of constant inspiration and emulation.