

Practical Spirituality and the Contemporary City: Awakening the Transformative Power for Sustainable Living

Christoph Woitwode (with Nisha Woitwode)

ABSTRACT

Contemporary, modern urbanisation and planning are largely concerned with the outer, exterior dimensions of the built environment. Even though the highly debated and contested paradigm of sustainable urban development is deeply value laden, mainstream urban planning solutions typically remain at a relatively superficial physical and technical level. In this article, I intend to offer an optimistic perspective of bringing to bear the concept of practical spirituality onto the realm of sustainable urban development. Socio-cultural shifts, visible in many initiatives across the world, demonstrate especially in Western countries like Germany, a new awareness and practices of at times spiritually informed conscious living. A central theme is how deeper transformations at the individual and collective societal levels take place, what it means, and in which way they are brought into the public policy area of urban community or neighbourhood development. This is exemplified briefly by studying the approach of the transition town movement.

Keywords: Urbanisation, planning, transformative development, new spirituality, sustainability

Reintegrating spirituality into human consciousness [...] requires connecting to the transpersonal and the divine, as well as reintegrating body, soul, and spirit. It is also about a relation to physical space – the city, in this case – as a point of reference for humankind's anchoring in the cosmos (Fingerhuth, 2004: 100).

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Introduction: Spirituality Goes Urban

UR, MOHENJO-DARO, BEIJING, Bhaktapur, and Teotihuacan are just a few ancient and medieval cities whose undergirding meaning is a display of the cosmic order as viewed by its residents. For millennia, the design and layout of human settlements have been interpreted as representations of sacral cosmologies, which were spiritually enacted by their inhabitants in annual cycles of rituals.¹ This formerly inherent feature of deep cosmological meaning in a city's morphology and cultural fabric has largely given way over the course of approximately the last 200 years to the modernist, scientific-objective notion of urban planning – originating in and subsequently exported by the Western world. Undoubtedly, the apex of this development was reached in the twentieth century.² Leitmotifs such as 'form follows function' combined with the belief in a rationalised, materialistic world stripped of religious and spiritual dimensions of life became the predominant world view and guiding principles in twentieth century urbanization and design.^{3,4}

Simultaneously, twentieth century global development is marked by unprecedented, rapid urbanization, which is seen as a process of ever ongoing technological progress and innovation that would eventually lead to the irrelevance of spirituality. Global urbanisation has reached levels never seen before. Particularly in Asia and Africa, population growth rates in urban areas are witnessed that will catapult them close to urbanization rates of 70 to 80 per cent in the course of the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, ever since life and living in cities has been viewed very ambiguously. For some, it may be a metaphor of progress, freedom,⁵ innovation, modernity, multifaceted lifestyles, and much more, whereas others see cities as permanently growing melanomas robbing their hinterland from resources, heavily polluted and environmentally damaging, with stressful lifestyles, abject poverty, social inequality and alienation from the natural world; whether we like it or not, the future of humanity appears inescapably urban.

Urbanization, like industrialization, is often seen as the epitome of modernization and 'development', which, in the Western world at least, eventually left hardly any space for spiritual expression. Urbanization played a role in the modernist development path that was exported to the developing world with the same aim to 'rationalize' those societies: "The organizing premise was the belief in the role of modernization as the only force capable of destroying archaic superstitions and relations, at whatever social, cultural, and political cost. Industrialization and urbanization were seen as the

inevitable and necessarily progressive routes to modernization."⁶ Only in recent years do we witness a revival of spirituality in many Western societies, which is also increasingly entering public debates. Thus, the major German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* featured two special reports within one year, the last one dated May 2013 at the time of writing, entitled "The Renaissance of Unreason."⁷ The title heading is telling insofar as journalistic commentators and even most of the scholars studying this phenomenon do not seem to grasp the salient characteristics of this return of spirituality. Besides indiscriminately lumping together Homeopathy, Ayurveda, Bachflower Therapy, Astrology, Tarot Card Reading and other far Eastern practices under the label of esotericism, there is almost always an emphasis on what the seemingly negative side-effects such as irrationality, superstition, or esoteric consumption of the adherents, as well as the individualising character practices of meditation and self-realisation would have.⁸ No matter how this cultural shift is interpreted – as threat or blessing, it is clearly a majorly urban phenomenon⁹ carried forward by the well-educated, intellectuals, and a high proportion of women.

Presently the sheer amount of accumulated, interconnected and globally relevant risks¹⁰ in various areas that touch our daily lives such as the economy, environment, food, society, and geo-politics seem to trigger a growing awareness of largely suppressed dimensions of human nature, namely that we equally need to recognise the emotional, psychological and spiritual being within us. Spirituality has hitherto not been on the agenda of urban policy makers, professionals and many urban dwellers, at least in the context of the (post)modernist world views dominant in the Western hemisphere. In the context of above mentioned global conditions, we observe an emerging significance and re-positioning of religious and spiritual values, not merely as a 're-enchantment' in Europe, but in many parts of the world, with their own very specific local characteristics.¹¹

An Evolving Cosmic Perspective of Sustainable Urbanization

The concept of sustainability entered international politics mainly after the conference on the environment and development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Subsequently, it found its way onto the urban development agenda at the Habitat II conference in Istanbul in 1996. Since the 1990s the term stands for a paradigmatic shift in global development as well as national and local action plans.¹² A widely accepted principle of sustainability is the integration of ecological with economic and social concerns. Over the years, myriads of definitions have been created and many attempts were made to break down an abstract concept into practice, including to broaden and expand the triad of

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social, economic and environmental by physical, political, and cultural dimensions. More recently Capra¹³ developed a relatively novel, synergetic notion of sustainability combining economic, social, ecological, life sciences with mind and consciousness studies. In this more integrative view, "a sustainable human community is one designed in such a manner that its ways of life, businesses, economy, physical structures and technologies do not interfere with nature's inherent ability to sustain life. Sustainable communities evolve their patterns of living over time in continual interaction with other living systems, both human and non-human. [...]. There are six principles of ecology that are critical to sustaining life: networks, cycles, solar energy, diversity and dynamic balance"¹⁴ C.

profoundly change their very approach to the management and planning of cities in order to face the complex and uncertain challenges of the twenty-first century urbanization.²¹

Generally, the looming disaster of climate change draws growing attention towards more integral, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary, meta-theoretical, complex open-systems thinking. This kind of epistemology is relatively novel with respect to climate change adaptation and mitigation²² as well as in urban planning theory and practice.²³ A number of meta-theoretical or disciplinary 'boundary-bridging' theories and frameworks evolved in the past four decades.²⁴ Many integral scholars draw from a wide range of disciplines, with references particularly to the work of the early German idealists (Hegel, Schelling), the Indian monistic (*advaita*) tradition, philosophers Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Rudolf Steiner, psychologists Jean Gebser and Abraham Maslow, to name a few. Principally all of these efforts pose a critical response to the prevalent modernist reductionism or 'flatland' (Wilber) created by the dominance of science. As a consequence, a key theme of these and other writers is the relationship between religion and science, in particular their attempt of integrating these two fundamental human intellectual and spiritual efforts. This body of literature overlaps considerably with those perspectives on sustainable development which are, according to Wheeler,²⁵ concerned with spirituality and ethics yet till date cannot be considered part of the mainstream in the professional planning community. In searching for an alternative paradigm to twentieth century modernity, they focus on the transformation of values and mindsets, and fostering a reconnection with the Earth and all being.

Making spirituality, evolution of consciousness, practices of personal transformation an explicit idea in the processes of modern urban development planning is a radically innovative approach. As noted in the introduction, while the application of spiritual cosmologies was almost exclusively the only method of city planning in ancient civilizations like Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, China, the Mayans, and the Greeks, the contemporary challenge lies in re-integrating spirituality with our current practices and theories. Swiss architect and urban planner Carl Fingerhuth summarises the trajectory of urbanization throughout history in relation to its spiritual underpinnings by highlighting our task ahead in the 'beyond-the-modern era', as he calls it:

Each era – in line with its social, economic, and cultural goals – defines a specific gestalt for its cities. Thus the pre-modern era reflected its

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spirituality in its cities. Modernism's exploration of rationality led to the suppression of spirituality and the gestalt of cities was therefore shaped by rational energies. [...] Western spirituality is re-emerging with great force nowadays and is connected to our roles in the cosmos. This is creating a new relationship with the universe, to nature, and to landscape, or rather to what the Taoists describe as the 'wind you cannot comprehend,' and the 'water you cannot grasp.' This experience of spiritual connectedness is evident in the newfound commitment to ecology-minded cities, in all their various forms. Yet while this movement is rooted in spirituality, its current outward manifestation remains, in practice, still technical. It deals with the management of land and existing structures, the reduction of environmental pollution, transportation and traffic policies, energy resource management, the protection and development of green spaces, and waste management. [...] I believe little consideration has been given to the fundamental implications of our newfound spiritual connection to the cosmos beyond obvious ecological tasks. In this regard, we are only at the beginning of a great and long process.²⁶

As a result, the concept of sustainable (urban) development, conventionally comprising social, economic and environmental factors, could be significantly expanded by acknowledging and including the interior (human) dimensions, as suggested by Esbjörn-Hargens and Zimmerman in their integral ecology and Brown in his discussion on integral sustainable development.²⁷ These notions would then connect a city's consciousness with its material base, according to Hamilton: "A city is a living system that emerges from the intentions and interactions of individuals and groups to produce both a conscious presence (or spirit) and a habitat (or a built city)."²⁸ Her quest to find an answer to the question of what a sustainable city drives her to propose "[...] perhaps it is easier to consider that all we could sustain in as complex a system as a city is the potential to emerge. This would be key to sustaining the city's resilience as a self-correcting cycle of adaptiveness."²⁹ Consequently, in a recent publication, Hamilton (2012) outlines a concept of city spirituality that "reveals Grace, Place and Space as outcomes from the dynamic interconnections of Beauty, Goodness and Truth"³⁰ driven by an involutory/evolutionary impulse.

Other urbanists too, make the point of linking development and the city to the larger picture of cosmic evolution. Notable is Canadian politician and activist Clive Doucet in his book *Urban Meltdown: Cities, Climate Change and Business as Usual* published in 2007. He includes his own perspectives about emotions as well as world views and values making this treatise highly stimulating, specifically in terms of the inter-subjective and subjective dimensions. Thus, Doucet also does

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not shy away from discussing the religious dimension and aspects of love.³¹ For instance, writing in the tradition of reflexive anthropology he describes how he took time out for one year to live in the French Provence region which subsequently changed how he viewed his own life in Canada:

It began to be clear that the starting place for creating secure and sustainable cities was something so basic that it had to do with reformatting the way we think. We need to redefine what we think of as 'progress' because without a new consensus about what progress is, mall sprawl will just keep rolling out across the countryside like a carpet. The principal way people now imagine living is making money, getting a big house in the best suburban neighbourhood possible, owning a couple of SUVs and flying south for a winter holiday.³²

Not surprisingly, Doucet points out the difficulties human beings have in 're-framing' or re-imagining a future that consciously departs from the destructive underpinnings of modern (city) life, thus exposing the psychological, consciousness dimension of humans. By doing so, the psycho-spiritual dimension is (re-) introduced in urban life and (urban) development. Apparently, the threat of considerable changes in global climatic patterns requires a fundamental reflection and rethinking of humanity's existential foundations, of humankind's place in the universe. Doucet expresses this by reflecting on his own soul and the divine that is rooted in the integrity of creation, he touches upon the "ultimate mystery of creation and existence" and the interwoven interdependence we humans are part of in today's world: "If you believe that the soul is a shared facility, care of the individual soul also requires care for the collective soul, your city and the planet."³³ Even more so, interestingly he paints the interconnectedness of the universe by drawing a line from the individual via the society to the planet in his chapter "Care of the Soul/Care of the City/Care for the Planet" to highlight how we as human beings are an integral part of a larger picture and, with respect to climate change, existential dimensions such as the soul, the divine and spirituality need to be considered. The following section will take these abstract ideas further to the practice level of social action and interaction.

Practical Urban Spirituality: The Power of Transformative Action

In his classical epic poem *Metamorphoses*, the Roman poet Ovid neatly wrote two millennia ago: *In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas/corpora* ("I intend to speak of forms changed into new entities"). Transformation, in its basic meaning, is a fundamental change beyond the known form (the literal meaning of *meta-morph* in Greek) involving

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the characteristic traits of a specific phenomenon. In this section, I intend to explore the link between transformation as a fundamental side effect of spiritual practice with the potential to be a force towards transformative action within urban sustainability planning. In 2011, the German Advisory Council on Global Change published its report entitled *World in Transition: A Social Contract for Sustainability*.³⁴ As a non-binding policy document it recommends a great transformation to cope with the global ecological crisis, particularly climate change. Precisely because the report underscores the central role of sustainable urban development, the authors identify *Transformative Governance of Urbanisation* as one out of three "key transformation fields" at the global level. Though a remarkable endeavour due to its call for transdisciplinarity in combination with an emphasis on normative and values change, it still remains an insufficient move towards a transformative approach to sustainable living and urbanization as conceived in this essay. As I have shown in a critical analysis of the report,³⁵ transformation is conceptualized in a rather narrow sense, typically restricted to a 'Western' scientific perspective of cognition that does not acknowledge spiritual and mystical traditions – Eastern and Western alike.

Inner and outer transformation is a central aspect of most spiritual practices, especially if envisaged within a practical notion of spirituality that is concerned with pro-actively changing one's everyday attitudes and behaviour. According to Giri, "practical spirituality also emphasizes on transformative practice which leads to self-transformation, cultural transformation and world transformation."³⁶ Intrinsic of this perspective is a type of spirituality clearly rooted 'in-this-world' rather than one envisaging renunciation of the world, not a transcendent notion removed from our world, but conscious action in the quotidian world situated in the 'here-and-now.' Typically, this is a feature of the current revitalisation of spirituality in many Western societies which embrace an active or 'engaged spirituality'³⁷ or 'green yoga.'³⁸ Most ancient traditions and lineages of yoga and meditation in India have been engaged in similar philosophies and practices. Some of these belong to the ancient tantric tradition like the Natha lineage of yogis who are credited to have brought forward the present form of Hatha Yoga known in today's world. Some of the more recent ones like the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and Bhaskar's philosophy of meta-reality, are rooted in Vedas and carry the modern academic practical fashion. However, the growing number of yoga centres and

relate closely to the human body and mind in its varying conditions. Due to its openness, flexible adaptability and integral framework the tradition of yoga combines well with environmental activism: "Green Yoga is yoga that incorporates environmental mindfulness and activism in its spiritual orientation at a time of great global crisis. It stands for a sattvic mind and a sattvic world."³⁹ Both authors, Fürch and Feuerstein⁴⁰ emphasise the ethical and normative guidance yoga values can provide for the development of an ecologically sensitive awareness as well as an 'eco-yogic' practice.⁴¹

Indian cultural and philosophical traditions have a long history of integral thinking — i.e. the unity of being — that recognises human physical (body), intellectual (mind) and spiritual (soul) efforts as well as avoiding the strict separation of science and religion. These thoughts are also being variously adopted, incorporated and re-interpreted within the context of modern times, for example in Vandana Shiva's work⁴² or from a decidedly spiritual practice point of view in the Svadhyaya Movement.⁴³ As outlined above, integral thinking has gained momentum in the West in the past decades to overcome the Cartesian schism. The significance of an integral approach to interlinked challenges such as sustainable urbanization, climate change, and development is to bring in the process of inner transformation — of consciousness development, a theme already taken up by the authors of "The Limits to Growth" in 1972.

Even though till date conventional approaches of education for sustainability usually do not consider the potentials of spiritual growth, development of consciousness and personal transformation are increasingly seen as important dimensions framing and underlying the notions of and responses to climate change and sustainable development.⁴⁴ The Human Development Report 2007/2008 takes note of a "fundamental sense in which climate change challenges us to think differently about human interdependence."⁴⁵ As noted, spirituality and change of consciousness are close companions, for such a shift takes place as a consequential result of spiritual practice. But most of these disciplines and practices do not require a strong commitment towards transformation of the mind at the beginning. Observers with various disciplinary backgrounds assert that the current global crises are due to failures in human consciousness and environmental ethics.⁴⁶ In planning for sustainability, Wheeler has adopted a focus on co-evolutionary processes of social and institutional change based on ecological economist Richard Noorgard's model. This approach, he suggests, would help "people see the world differently (changing cognition), through teaching, writing, art, even architecture [...] Helping values change, through spiritual practice,

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teaching, personal example, work with children, or other means, can likewise help lay the groundwork for social evolution."⁴⁷

Transformative movements such as the transnational Transition Town initiatives (see next section) are examples of an emerging practical 'urban' spirituality, for they seek to pragmatically transform "everyday life and the struggle for justice and dignity."⁴⁸ But what exactly does this transformation entail? Is transformation more than social and cultural change? To what extent does this type of transformation differ from the use common in urban contexts? Conventionally, urban transformations comprise foremost the exterior, physical transformation of the built environment, often also considering social and cultural features yet paying no attention to personal growth and development, higher human potentials and self-transformation towards innovative, more sustainable lifestyles. In a recent empirically grounded study based on interviews conducted worldwide with religious and secular organisations, Noy⁴⁹ presents six ideal type visions of development. The 'transformative spiritualist' approach resembles principles of practical spirituality, for it "involves the creation of a new, evolved human order based on spiritual principles of unity, justice, expansion of consciousness and moderation of human consumption. The key to this development is spiritual transformation, either purely internally or combined with social action."⁵⁰ Social movement organisations and progressive activist religious movements – e.g. engaged Buddhism, Liberation Theology, Gandhian organisations, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga – carry such a development notion.

It is only recently that such elements of practical spirituality are applied in various policy areas related to sustainable urban development. Urban community and neighbourhood development, action research/planning and participatory planning approaches appear particularly suitable to be enriched by practices of individual and collective transformation. For example, the "Heilhaus" (healing house) movement in the German town of Kassel.⁵¹ The "Heilhaus" is a vision to integrate the life cycle of birth, living and dying in a community of everyday life. Holistic healing in this context encompasses various activities such as guiding people in medical, therapeutic, social and spiritual terms. Over the years a small settlement came up around the "Heilhaus." Community life, mutual support, taking part at social and cultural activities, creating community and spiritual practice are an integral part of everyday life. Through the presence and activities of the "Heilhaus," the adjacent urban neighbourhood is changing as well. The area where it is located is an old industrial estate ridden by unemployment, poverty and social issues. By harbouring many children and adolescents and a multi-

ethnic population, it is a lively neighbourhood with a great development potential. The "Heilhaus"-movement has a commitment to play an active part in this, following its guiding qualities of hope, compassion and community life. These values provide the impulse for its educational and cultural work, promoting health and economic development for instance through generating new jobs. In these efforts the "Heilhaus" foundation is financially supported by the German Federal Ministry of Urban Development within the national programme "Soziale Stadt" (the Social City).

In Germany, neighbourhood management has become a popular strategy in socially and economically deprived urban areas since the 1990s, but the approach of the "Heilhaus" adds an utterly novel dimension to an otherwise socio-technocratic urban development programme. In this respect, the Transition Town (TT) movement is an approach to community and neighbourhood development that integrates and works explicitly with the psychology of addiction, change and the interior dimensions of human existence.

Transition Town Initiatives: The Head, The Heart, the Hands⁵²

Contemporary urban social movements particularly in post-industrial societies increasingly emerge as drivers of global cultural shifts from materialist to post-materialist values.⁵³ New forms of cooperative urban housing and shared ownership or guerilla gardening are some other expressions of this. They shape the context of transition-town initiatives (following TT initiatives), and similar related movements like intentional and eco-communities, although most of the latter are located outside cities. The transition town movement is proof for a need to go urban. Earlier a 'romantic vision' of living in and with nature inspired most intentional communities, which saw the city as an undesired contradiction. In the future, this division needs to be overcome to seek an integration of nature with culture, for we seem unable to escape the ongoing urbanization of our planet. Indeed 'nature' is being rediscovered in the city through urban gardening, reclamation of barren land, and in the existing biodiversity of parks, lakes, rivers and forests.

The first TT initiative was launched in 2005 in the town of Totnes in Great Britain. Till date, it has rapidly spread to other countries, villages, neighbourhoods, and big cities. TT initiatives are founded on the perceived inter-linkages and a convergence of peak oil and climate change, as two aspects of the same problem, with economic precariousness having been added later.⁵⁴ Peak oil directly links the initiatives to the global climate change discourse. As a consequence, so Hopkins' argument, the concept of resilience emerges as a pivotal

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pro-active response to these two combined global problems.⁵⁵ TT initiatives, as an emerging transnational phenomenon, are often considered intentional eco-communities. Intentional communities and eco-villages represent a very diverse scene, whereas the transition movement is distinct in at least two ways. First, it follows a coherent approach to change with an overarching framework followed by all member groups, and secondly, the groups are established in existing settlements or communities. I consider this latter aspect highly crucial as they do not attempt to dissociate or escape from existing social patterns and constraints, but intent to transform the very same. In urban planning, it has become fashion to draft carbon-neutral or otherwise labelled model towns such as Masdar city in Abu Dhabi to demonstrate possible high-tech solutions to climate change. However, the monumental challenge to an urbanized world will be to transform urban societies in existing settings. In this approach lies the significance of the TT initiatives for innovative processes of urban transformation. Central ideas underpinning the transition approach differ from conventional environmentalism in many ways:

- a) Emphasis on group behaviour;
- b) It is holistic;
- c) Tools: public participation, eco-psychology, arts, culture and creative education;
- d) Rebuild and increase resilience/(re)localization of production and consumption;
- e) Application of the philosophy and principles of permaculture;
- f) Hope, optimism and proactivity as drivers for action;
- g) Changing national and international policy by making them electable;
- h) The man in the street as the solution;
- i) Targeted interventions;
- j) Engagement on a variety of levels;
- k) Acts as a catalyst – no fixed answers;
- l) Carbon footprinting plus resilience indicators;
- m) Designing for economic renaissance, albeit a local one.⁵⁶

TT initiatives do explicitly incorporate psychological effects both peak oil and climate change can have on us. In fact, the inevitability of a change of attitudes and behaviours, and eventually a transformation of consciousness is acknowledged by explicitly addressing the elusive issue of the psychology of change. It is the more significant as this dimension is largely neglected by governments and scientific assessments of these phenomena, resulting in policy recommendations which are socio-technical in nature but miss out on the subtle realities people actually cope with. Cultural and psychological, cognitive aspects

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of climate change are only slowly entering the discourse on climate change. "I think that alongside an understanding of the issues, it is important not to pretend that we can keep our awareness of these issues on a purely intellectual 'head' level, but that we need to address the 'heart' too, acknowledging that this is disturbing information, that it affects us, and that how it affects us in turn shapes how we respond – or don't."⁵⁷ In virtue of explicitly accepting the need for psychological change and working with this concept, Hopkins suggests three principles how to go about it: a) pay attention to the steps of change that happen inside people: this lays the foundation of the 'Heart and Soul groups' within TT initiatives which guide processes of inner change and pay attention to issues like motivation, resistance, and ambivalence; b) create spaces for people to feel heard in making their own arguments for change; and c) if a change seems too difficult, have a preparation stage for training ourselves.⁵⁸

The inner dimension or the interior has become a part of many TT initiatives or sub-groups therein, often called 'Heart and Soul Group.' These working groups accept the fact of a psychological, often also spiritual, dimension of change being connected to the outer, behavioural, socio-technical changes. Very early on, it appears, Hopkins⁵⁹ was aware of the necessity to understand the psychology of change, an area usually completely neglected in international debates on climate change.⁶⁰ Prentice⁶¹ describes three distinct strands that are drawn together: 1. Psychology and psychotherapy in the West, more recently eco-psychology, 2. Teachings about the transformation of consciousness, often drawing from Eastern traditions, (but increasingly also transpersonal psychology, 3. Impulses from indigenous peoples 'who still remember, and practise, Earth-centred wisdom, and who have not forgotten how to live sustainably on the Earth.' On the one hand, this area of inner transition, Prentice points out, can be a very contentious issue for the people involved, because bringing the interior explicitly out in transition work is a challenge particularly with view to hotly contested notions, diverse views and opinions on religion, spirituality and similar concepts. On the other hand, many people indeed see the qualities that such a transition calls for – cooperation (rather than competition), creativity, compassion and love, non-violence, and others – as being at the heart of their spiritual life. Hence, "For many people, spirituality can be explicit as well as implicit, and their spiritual life is central to their personal resilience."⁶²

Clearly, with regard to urban planning, TT initiatives can be expected to stimulate a debate about a transformation of planning practice, theory, and the practitioners themselves by moving beyond

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(post)modernist perspectives which have not yet discovered their blind spot in terms of psycho-spiritual aspects of human nature and as inherent part of any planning exercise.

Conclusion: Reconnecting Spirit, Place and People for a Sustainable Urban Future

We need to reconnect the triad of spirit, place and people in order to regenerate viable solutions for an urban future of planet Earth. If we succeed, urban sustainability will be dramatically revised. In this essay I tried to bring together a broadened concept of urban sustainability encompassing eco-spirituality and social transformation at both individual and collective levels, as well as city consciousness as an evolutionary spirit with the built habitat. Central to this notion is the potential of a practical (urban) spirituality, which may include the transformation of the self with regard to one's quotidian life, values, lifestyles, consumption and world views based on a normative vision of an urbanised future in the twenty-first century.

Spirit is 'spirit in action' (Wilber), a practical, transformative practice on which the transition towards an urban sustainable lifestyle may be created. Pivotal in the current times is working towards a (re-) integration of spirit in the city, the urban, and the urban professions, for making spirituality an explicit idea in the processes of modern urban planning is in an embryonic stage. Apparently, a few academics and practitioners acknowledge the significance of spirituality in urban life, pro-actively pioneering to establish a link with urban planning theory and practice. Supported are these shifts in consciousness by a growing visibility of spiritual practices in Western societies. These social changes indicate that we must review a prevalent notion (rooted in the West) suggesting that processes like urbanization are inevitably linked to the secularization of society. Contrary to this, it seems there are some movements that have taken place not only in spite of but through urbanization itself, as for example in African Christian spirituality.⁶³

Place and space are 'natural,' inherent concepts of cities. Urban development and planning are practices that work traditionally three-dimensional with 'space' (and probably moving further as Fingerhuth suggests). Therefore this aspect must be given special attention in any discourse about 'practical spirituality' in an urban setting, for instance in terms of sacred and symbolic meanings of places and space. Beyond this, in relation to our 'footprint' on earth, in a larger picture, place also relates to the question of where our meaningful place – the sustainable place of cities - lies in this world and in the cosmos. This was reviewed in the essay in terms of an evolving world view

inhabiting a regained consciousness of our interconnectedness with all animate and inanimate things and beings. Another interface of spirituality with planning emerges from the very notion of place-making itself. Sacred places are an age old but in contemporary industrialised societies mostly forgotten concept, especially the notion of a symbolic landscape of sacred places such as buildings and natural landmarks like mountains, trees, rocks. Rediscovering and incorporating 'The Sacred' in terms of places is one way of acknowledging the continuum connectedness of human/culture-spirit-nature. The relevance of this is significant in a planning approach which takes social diversity and a pluralistic society seriously, for example by responding to the cultural frameworks of indigenous people like the Aborigines of Australia,⁶⁴ but undoubtedly also in relation to issues of sustainable development.

People as creators and inhabitants of cities form the foundation of cities. In this respect, recognizing the importance of each individual's potential to contribute towards a change in the world is one of the foremost tasks, even in a complex social context like the urban, since the capacity for individual transformation feeds back into collective transformation and vice versa. Why is it a foremost task? Because currently academia and politics are almost entirely following the mantra of systems theory, with a focus on macro-social structures. Such emphasis on networks, functional structures and relationships are certainly crucial, yet eventually we will not gain anything by neglecting the role of individual change agents and social pioneers. Anthropologists and sociologists have pointed out the innate interdependence of individual and social structures. Giddens has demonstrated this interaction of agency and structure of societies in his 'theory of structuration,'⁶⁵ whereas Geertz had previously presented a notion of the interactive creation of cultural webs of meaning as interplay of individuals and their inter-subjectively created symbolic structures.⁶⁶ This is a pivotal notion connecting practical spirituality and transformative powers of individuals to the collective dimensions of society beyond the currently predominant systems perspective. Key to an integration of practical spirituality as transformative urban planning practices towards sustainable living are also people as professional co-creators of cities. Their role in planning processes, designing policies and shaping public debates can only change if the pioneering few are supported by respective changes in the curricula of urban studies and planning courses. Forerunners with potential in this area at the institutional level are the Indian Institute of Human Settlements (IIHS) which explicitly includes the urban practitioner's self. At a broader level the University for the

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Future Initiative (www.u4f.net) aims to provide higher education and research towards individual and collective transformation for rural and urban communities.

In the light of these dynamics, I want to conclude with a series of questions rather than answers to stimulate further thought. Many of these arise especially for planners and the context of sustainable urban development. What does spirituality mean in the context of planning, planning theory/practice and the practitioner? Is it another analytical category for practitioners or an inherent dimension that needs to be practiced in some way? Which are the potentials of spirituality for the planning profession and urban development planning? How and why do city dwellers take recourse to new forms of spirituality? What is or may be the role(s), potentials of spirituality for (post-)modern urban societies? In which way is spirituality expressed in an urban context in different parts of the world? What can we learn from collected case studies in different regions of the world? What are "best practices" demonstrating the role of spirituality in urban development? Is it feasible at all to integrate spirituality with urban development? What is its role in relation to practical approaches and instruments such as governance, participation and communication, analysing and understanding the city and its inhabitants?

Notes and References

1. They were embedded in a larger cosmology, a prime example being Kashi (Varanasi) in India (Fischer et al., 1987; Pieper, 1977; Sherring, 1868). In addition, even if many or most cities did not follow a planned layout as such, the spatial-spiritual meaning was, and still is cognitively structured by religious buildings and recurring ceremonial processions which re-establish and re-confirm the cosmological order. Presently, this spatial appropriation and publicly visible representation of religious practice and life is gaining momentum in many European cities due to Muslim communities and their aspirations to build places of worship rather than hiding away in backroom prayer halls.
2. This development though, did not take place uniformly across the world. It is important to note that a continuity of spiritual and religious traditions is existent especially in parts of the world outside the 'Western' cultural hemisphere such as India or other Southeast Asian countries (Woiwode 2012a in Trialog), while at the same time new religious elements like Pentecostal and Evangelical movements in Africa and Latinamerica are dynamically emerging (MetroZones, 2011).
3. Cox, Harvey, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in*

- Theological Perspective* (New York: Macmillan, 1965).
4. The 'Athens Charter' of the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne – CIAM (International Congresses of Modern Architecture) was highly influential here. Led by Le Corbusier, a French architect (who designed the new town of Chandigarh in India), CIAM propagated 'The Functional City' by strict segregation rather than an intermingled mix of uses as observed in historic towns. This author believes that the spiritually inspired township Auroville in South India is heavily influenced by this then predominant zeitgeist, especially due to the French influence brought in by The Mother. Whether such functional segregation is to be followed strictly is a recurring and unresolved issue in the discussion of the spatial-physical development of Auroville. What seems to be obvious, nonetheless, is the fact that it is somewhat contrary to the ideal of integration (e.g. in larger settlements this separation is a cause for increased traffic due to long distances, walkability becomes an issue). Contemporary debates on sustainable cities thus, revolve around density, mix of uses, and the city of short distances to reduce traffic movement.
 5. In Germany an age old saying goes: 'Stadtluft macht frei' (= 'city air is liberating'), which is a reference to the political freedom of self-government medieval settlement enjoyed, if they had formally obtained city status. Dwellers within the precinct of these cities were considered free citizens, i.e. free of bonded labour. A similar concept existed in the ancient Greek *polis*.
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 8. Many scholars are theologians in the Christian tradition with little or no knowledge of Islamic, Buddhist, Taoist and Hindu philosophies and religious traditions, not to speak of related practices. Their limited knowledge is particularly visible in the confusion of ego and self, which is then interpreted as an individualized practice that would merely focus on one's own liberalization, entirely neglecting the notion of a universal Self and the *bodhisattva* which fosters caring, connectedness, love and an urgency to address the many problems of this planet. Such notions are completely misguided and need to be strongly opposed.
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CHRISTOPH WOIWODE, Visiting Professor, Indo-German Centre for Sustainability, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Chennai 600 036, India, +91 (0)44 2257 8446 (Office), +91 996 2878 061 (Mobile), woiwode@igcs-chennai.org, www.igcs-chennai.org

NISHA WOIWODE is a Yoga Health Practitioner, currently based in Chennai with work experience in Sri Lanka, Germany and India.

Narayan Desai is No More

Shri Narayan Mahadev Desai, a Veteran Gandhian passed away in the early morning of 15th March 2015. With his death we have lost living links with our beloved and revered Bapu. But the memory of his precious links will ever remain in our hearts.

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