Sustaining Urban Innovation

Mega-Cities Project's Journey in 2024 & Vision for 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our work this year was dedicated to advancing knowledge production and solution-sharing about urbanization, the informal sector and community-led urban innovations. Our activities reflect the diversity and reach of our initiatives, encompassing research, documentation, dissemination, advocacy, and global engagement. These activities reflect our dedication to urbanism "*as if people mattered.*" In international and local urban agendas, this has been adapted, at least in language, but in the private sector it is still off the radar. [1] In 2024 the Mega-Cities Project received recognition and validation of our 36 years of work on several fronts.

In terms of **original research and knowledge creation**, we advanced a unique research project on the **Life Cycle of Urban Innovations** that MCP had identified, documented, disseminated, and – in many cases- -transferred to other cities between 1988 and 2008. In terms of changing **mindset and public policy** about the value of the informal sector to flourishing cities, our message permeated the sessions at the 12th **World Urban Forum** in Cairo. Our persistent work demonstrating the impact of community initiatives and the scaling effects of adapting innovations across cities is now part of the UN Habitat Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Many of Perlman's PhD students and former MCP student interns are now working in international agencies.

On the contrary, our people-oriented message was a provocation at the **Smart Cities Conference in Miami** on the topic of "Future-Ready Communities and Cities". Amid a group of impressive architects, engineers, and technology experts from all over the world, Perlman suggested that "cities of the future will only be smart, innovative, resilient and future-ready if they consider who will live there and how they will live, rather than designing cool hi tech playgrounds for the elite.

Another milestone this year was the long-awaited **publication** of Perlman's book *Favela: Four Decades of Living on the Edge* in Portuguese. The book signing event in March at the famous Travessa Book Store in Rio was a meeting of people from all decades of her work and all walks of life. The publisher,

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Rio Books did an outstanding job and has agreed to make this available at a reduced rate to community residents and students.

On our home turf the MCP approach to finding and promoting grassroots innovations in underserved communities was built into the founding of the **New York Women's Foundation**. At a Bronx dinner celebrating the "Founding Mothers", I got to see how transformational this is—the women philanthropists who gave money had to visit the communities to identify and interview the local leaders –and many of the young "grantee partners" are now board members themselves.

As one longtime member of our Global Advisory Board wrote:

This report brings much needed solace in discouraging days. Your work and the Mega-Cities Project have made a profound difference. You long ago explained and legitimized the wisdom of the dispossessed when given opportunity. Then you nurtured and publicized examples of investment in the creative power of partnerships with marginal communities. 40 years ago, your paradigm was seen as a romantic notion in academia and anathema in circles of wealth and power. Now it is a basic platform in international urban policy circles. That has been transformative.

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1. THE LIFE CYCLE OF URBAN INNOVATIONS

The goal of this research project is to determine the factors that contributed to the success or failure (scaling up or dissipating) of the urban innovations that The Mega-Cities Project (MCP) has uncovered in network of cities around the globe, since our inception in 1988. We aim to discover what drives meaningful change and what barriers must be overcome to guide future work in the area. Among some 450 innovations MCP identified in 20 cities in our network in the late 1980s through the early 2000s we selected the 26 experiences for which we could find most information We traced their trajectories to understand the factors influencing the outcomes.

Figure 1 Geographic distribution of 26 urban innovations identified by the Mega-Cities Project (MCP) across 20 cities worldwide.

The Table below shows the names, cities and organizations of each innovation and classifies them according to Initiating Sector, Policy Area, and Current State.

Urban innovation	City	Organization	Initiating Sector	Policy Area	Current State
Banana Kelly	New York City	Banana Kelly	NGO	Housing	Continuing
City Harvest		City Harvest	NGO	Food & agriculture	Continuing
Environmental Benefits Program		City environmental agency	Local government	Toxic controls	Continuing
NY Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project (AVP)		NY Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project (AVP)	NGO	Social inclusion & Safety	Continuing
The National Audubon Society Headquarters		The National Audubon Society	NGO	Environmental	Needs further research.
The NYC Toilet Rebate Program		New York City Government	Local government	Water & sanitation	Concluded
A Window Between Worlds	Los Angeles	A Window Between Worlds	NGO	Social inclusion & Safety	Continuing
Hope LA Horticulture Corps		Hope LA Horticulture Corps	NGO	Food & agriculture	Needs further research.
Small Business Toxics Minimization Project		Los Angeles Board of Public Works	Local government	Toxic control	Needs further research.
The Green School Program/Eco-		The Center for Environmental Education	NGO	Environmental	Needs further research.

School					Continuing
Tree People		Tree People	NGO	Urban agriculture/greening	Continuing
Alert II	São Paulo	São Paulo State Department of the Environment	Local government	Environmental	Continuing
Women's Police Stations		State Government of São Paulo	Local government	Social inclusion & Safety; Gender	Continuing
SIRDO Solid Waste Technology	Mexico City	GTA and alternative technology group	Private sector	Water & sanitation	Continuing
Programa Alimentario Integral y Solidario (PAIS) Food Program	Buenos Aires	Ministry of Social Action of the Buenos Aires Province	Local government	Food & agriculture	Discontinued
Remunerated Reforestation of Favelas	Rio de Janeiro	Municipal government of Rio de Janeiro	Local government	Urban agriculture/greening	Continuing
Surface Metro	Curitiba	Municipal government of Curitiba	Local government	Transportation	Continuing
Dream Island	Tokyo	Tokyo Metropolitan Government	Local government	Solid waste & garbage collection	Continuing
Mobile Creches	Delhi	Mobile Creches	NGO	Social inclusion & Safety; Gender	Continuing
ASHA Health Cooperative		ASHA	NGO	Health	Continuing
Community of Resource Organization (CORO) Public	Mumbai	Community of Resource Organization (CORO)	NGO/Grassroots	Water & sanitation; Gender	Continuing

Toilets					
Child to Child		A hospital, medical college, the Municipal Government, and school system	Multisectoral (mostly local government)	Health	Needs further research.
Bidara Cina Greening Program	Jakarta	RW14, Urban Greening Movement and Provincial Office of the Department of Education and Culture	NGO/Grassroots/Government	Urban agriculture/greening	Needs further research.
Magic Eyes Anti-Litter Campaign	Bangkok	Thai Environmental and Community Development Association (TECDA)	NGO	Solid waste & garbage collection	Continuing
Zabbaleen Community Development	Cairo	The Zabbaleen; EQI Consulting Firm; Association for the Protection of the Environment (APE)	Grassroots/ NGOs	Solid waste & garbage collection	Continuing
Urban Market Gardens	Accra	The Vegetable Growers Association	Grassroots	Urban agriculture/greening	Needs further research.

Table 1: The names, cities and organizations of each innovation and classifies them according to Initiating Sector, Policy Area, and Current State.

We selected five of these innovations to test proof of concept. That is to discover whether the existing information on them was sufficiently robust to warrant further study.

1. Women's Police Stations (São Paulo)
2. Remunerated Self-Help Reforestation (Rio de Janeiro)
3. Asha Health Cooperative (Delhi)

4. Magic Eyes Anti-Littering Campaign (Bangkok)
5. Zabbaleen Community Development (Cairo).

[See Appendix I for more detail on the way this research was conducted].

2. 12TH WORLD URBAN FORUM (WUF), CAIRO

"The Twelfth Session of the World Urban Forum WUF12, convened by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), took place in Cairo, Egypt, from 4 to 8 November 2024, returning to the African continent after more than 20 years after its inception in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2002."

Figure 2: World Urban Forum 12, Cairo (November 2024): Left – The Egypt International Exhibition Center, the venue for the forum. Right – The opening session, gathering global experts and policymakers to discuss urban development challenges and solution.

I went to Cairo to represent the Mega-Cities Project at this 12th World Urban Forum – a city summit organized by UN Habitat. MCP has played a key role in many of these including the first one in 1992. **We provide a bridge among and between the UN and International agencies, local governments, academics, non-profit organizations and community-based coalitions.** At the Earth Summit (Rio92), cities were merely a brief mention alongside women and people with disabilities. Over 30 years later, it's inspiring to witness how far we've come—this year's World Urban Forum 12 Egypt reached 25,000 participants (in-person & online) from 182 countries. This massive event provides a good way to get a sense of what is happening in the urban space and to connect with colleagues and advocacy networks. Now in director positions in UN Habitat are several former MCP student interns from Columbia University: Asa Johnson and Fernanda Lonardoni and others. The former director of UNESCO for Urban Heritage, Francesco Bandarin, was a PhD student of mine at UC Berkeley. Among the speakers were several of our regional and city coordinators, plus my Research Assistant, Paulo Moraes from Recife during my Fulbright.

The people and coalitions we have partnered with to spread the word about the value of disenfranchised urban dwellers are still doing research and advocacy and credit the MCP for help in their early years.

These include Slum/Shack Dwellers International, Habitat International Coalition; Coalition of Neighborhood Women; Samsook from Bangkok, Celine de Cruz from Mumbai. Genie Birch, UPenn Professor, and others.

2.1. Panel honoring the legacy of John F.C. Turner

I was invited to speak on the panel on **"Housing by People"** honoring the **continuing legacy of John F.C. Turner** who died in 2023 at the age of 96. Turner was a pioneer in redefining informal settlements as "the solution, not the problem". He viewed "housing as a verb"—an ongoing process driven by people themselves. He was awarded the Right Livelihood Award in 1988 for "championing the rights of

Figure 3: Dr. Janice Perlman at the World Urban Forum 2024 in Cairo explores the legacy of John Turner, advocating for the rights and dignity of informal settlement residents.

Figure 4: The Panel on "Housing by People" including Forbes Davidson (left), Janice Perlman, Geoffrey Payne, Kathrin Golda-Pongratz, Claudio Acioly at the World Urban Forum.

people to build, manage and sustain their own shelter and communities". He saw the role of architects as enabling that process rather than dominating it.

The panel, organized by Geoffrey Payne aimed to re-affirm the continuing power of community-led approaches to urban challenges. It was organized by Geoffrey Payne and included Forbes Davidson, Kathryn Golda-Pongratz, Claudio Acioly Jr.and me. Each of us worked with Turner in a different decade in a different region of the world. He was at MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning when I was doing my PhD there. His work in informal settlements in Lima and Santiago was an inspiration for my own research in Rio's favelas.

Figure 5: Presentation on "Housing by People".

To see the evolution of urban thought and to contribute to these conversations was a profound experience. The power of community-led approaches to urban challenges continues to inspire bold and transformative solutions, ensuring that Turner's legacy lives on. We will contribute that through a book,

to be published by UCL Press. My piece on "Demon to Darling: Child of the Dark or Model for Sustainable Cities?" will be one of the chapters.

Figure 6: Kathrin Golda - Pongratz showed a film she made with the community in Lima Peru about the history, breadth and impact of John's work on upgrading the informal settlement. His motto: Architect as enabler –housing by people.

While in Cairo, I went on two related site visits: 1) the town of Ismailia and 2) the Zabbaleen "trash-to-cash" innovators

2.2.   Field visit to Ismailia City's Participatory Slum Upgrading Project

One place to see Turner's influence on the ground at scale, is in the town of Ismailia, about two hours North of Cairo, bordering on the Suez Canal. Forbes Davidson, one of our panelists worked with him on participatory planning and then continued running the project for many years. https://forbesdavidsonplanning.com.
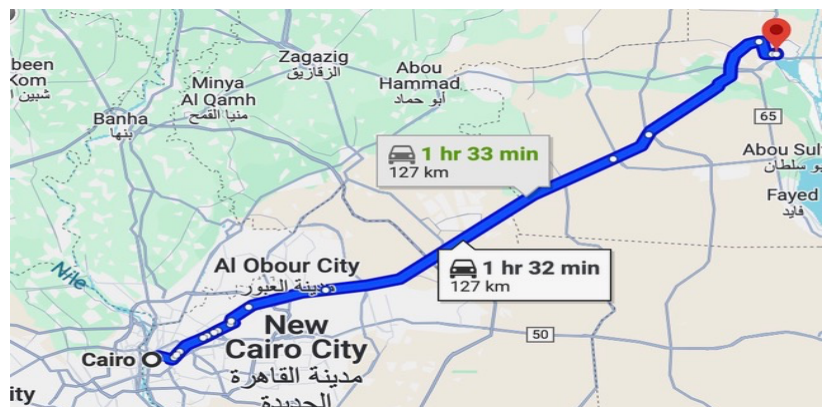

Figure 7: Journey to Ismailia: A town reflecting John Turner's influence in participatory planning, located two hours north of Cairo near the Suez Canal

We were welcomed by the Governor, who explained how participatory approaches contributed to the project's success and had arranged briefings for us from the Planning Department, GIS, mapping section and the participatory project was implemented between 2002 and 2010 with support from UNDP and UN-Habitat. It is one of the most effective housing and community development projects I have encountered. Together with Kathrin Golda-Pongratz, Forbes Davidson, Geoffrey Payne, Alonso Ayala, David Schelkshorn, and local partner Ahmet Soliman, we toured the informal settlements of El-Hallous and El-Bahtini, where much of the work took place.

Figure 8: A warm reception by the Governor and his planning staff.

Figure 9: Our group with the Suez Canal in the background.

Figure 10: Street Scenes. Boys eager to practice English with us (right).

Figure 11: Mixture of old and new housing, self-built and self-maintained.

2.3. Re-visit the Zabbaleen Community, Cairo

The word "Zabbaleen" is an Egyptian Arabic term for "garbage people" or "garbage collectors". It refers to the people who have informally collected Cairo's garbage since the 1940s. In fact, culturally they are the only group who can handle garbage. The largest settlement of Zabbaleen is next to an abandoned quarry at the foot of the Mokattam hills, east of Cairo. In the late 1980s The Mega-Cities Project had designated the Zabbaleen "trash to cash" project as one of our urban innovations worth documenting for our Environmental Justice book of Case studies (UNDP). We also brokered its successful adaptation to Manila and Mumbai.
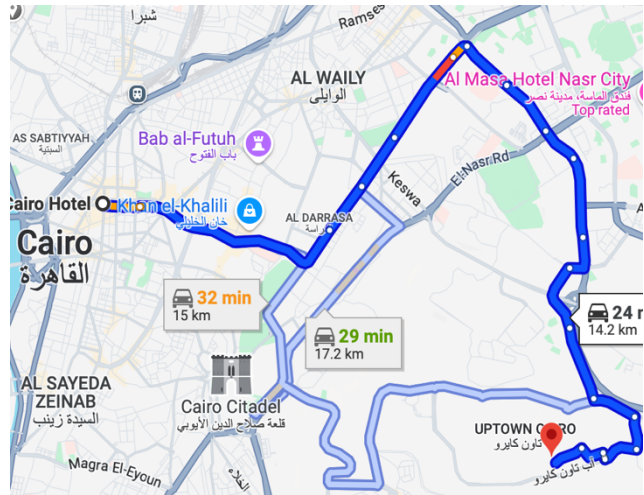

Figure 12: Zabbaleen Settlement, Mokattam Hills, East Cairo – Home to Cairo's informal waste collectors.

Figure 13: Pre-Recycling Initiative: Donkey carts with women and children dumping garbage into the abandoned quarry.

Figure 14: Images depict the process of separating and cleaning garbage categories as raw materials for arts projects.

Our Mega-Cities Coordinator in Cairo, Mounir Neamatella, founded an organization called EQI – Environmental Quality International 1981 and, in partnership with the Association for Protection of the Environment (APE) they created the Zabbaleen program. Instead of packaging the separate garbage streams and selling them for pennies in bulk, this initiative generated income for the community by turning waste into useful products through traditional crafts such as weaving, glassblowing, jewelry-making, and more. These lovely items were sold to upscale stores and individuals in Cairo, and eventually internationally. The photos below show what things looked like on my last trip in 1996 and what I found in 2024. What was once an abandoned quarry-turned-dump has been repurposed into a community space with a sports field for children, a garden nursery for edible and decorative plants, wider roads, and improved housing and sanitation facilities.
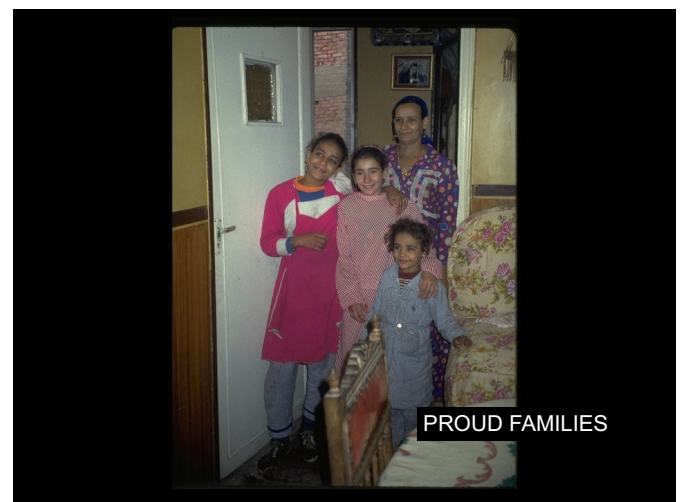

Figure 15: With income generated, people moved into decent apartments.

Figure 16: This sports field, recreation center and plant nursery are on the site of filled-in quarry.

Mounir arranged for Suzie, who works on site at the APE office, to show us around. The income generated enabled the community to seek a housing grant and move into apartments with water and sanitation. Being clean and having a decent place to live, allowed young men to court marriage partners.

Figure 17: Suzie Greiss and staff leaders in front of the Association for Protection of the Environment office.

Figure 18: Trucks replace donkeys (left), but women are still separating the garbage manually (right).

The garbage was no longer being transported by donkey carts because the income earned allowed the men to buy trucks. The children were no longer going out with the donkey carts and gathering garbage to take to the quarry but were going to school in crisp blue and white student uniforms. The art was separated into different workshops depending on the material and was for sale on site as well as in other markets. For tourists and potential donors, there was a small paperback book in English about the history of the Zabbaleen transformation.
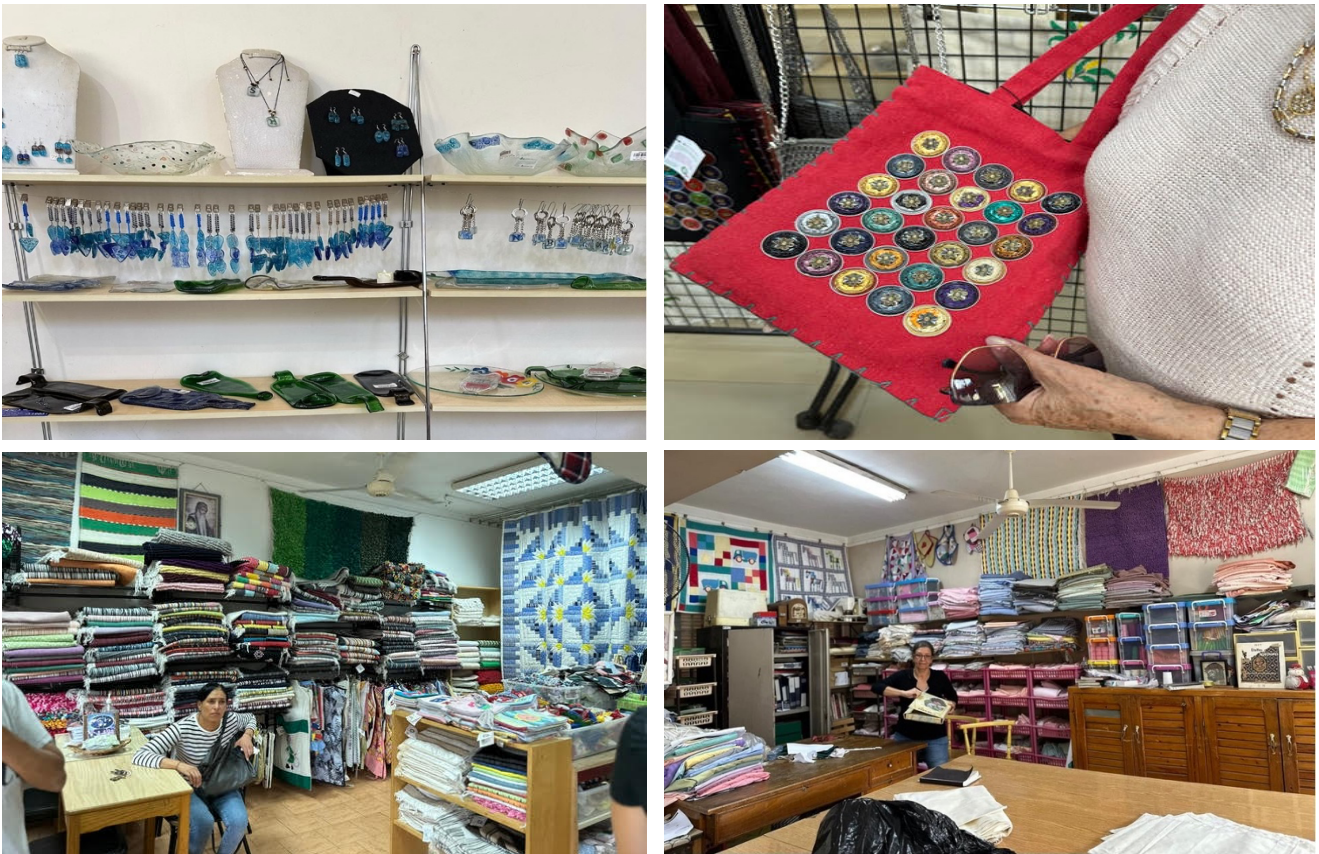

Figure 19: Art sales from recycled garbage supports the community.

3. HONOURS IN RIO DE JANEIRO

3.1. Perlman's Book Launched in Portuguese At The Livraria Da Travessa

Figure 20: Mega Cities Project - Favela Book Launch Event in Rio March 2024

On March 14, 2024, Rio Books publisher organized the launch and book signing event celebrating the paperback edition of my book "FAVELA" in Portuguese. The translation had already been completed and had been published as an e-book by the Getulio Vargas Foundation Press, but they had declined to do a printed version. Rio Books did a beautiful design for the book and the cover and included full-color photos. The event, in the famous Livraria Travessa, was attended by dozens of academics, urban scholars, community leaders, national and local government representatives, as well as friends and colleagues from across the half century of this endeavor. Denise Correa, the editor of Rio Books and Eduardo Lessa, the translator were toasted for the outstanding job they did. We worked hard to keep the price as low as possible to insure widespread access. The book is now available online [here](#).
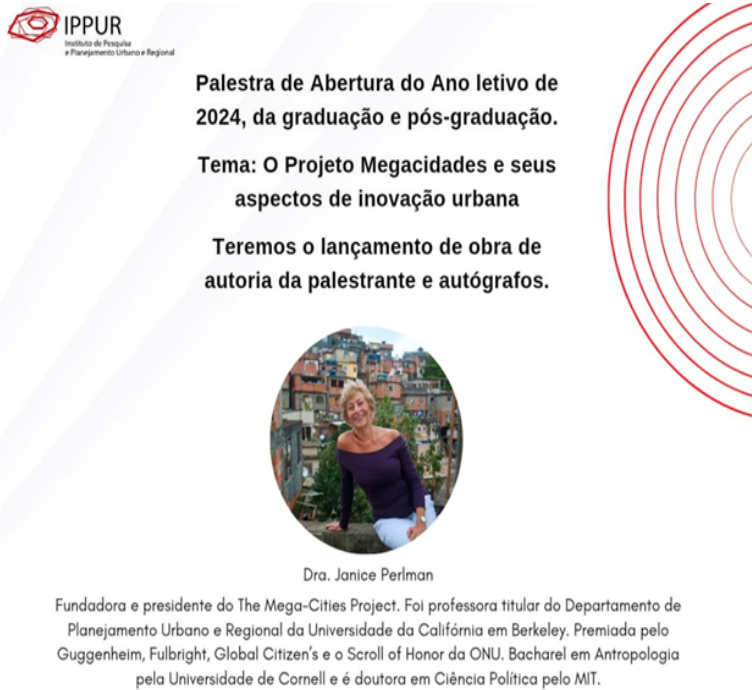
https://megacitiesproject.org/favela-book-launch-in-rio/#

https://megacitiesproject.org/invitation-to-an-event-book-signing-in-rio-de-janeiro-march-14-2024/

https://megacitiesproject.org/book-pre-sale-is-open-2/

3.2.   Magna Conference, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro

Dr. Perlman was invited by the Director of IPPUR, the Institute for Research and Urban and Regional Planning at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro to give the Opening Keynote for the year. On March 18, 2024, she gave a talk on the connection between theory and practice, presenting The Mega-Cities Project's strategy, urban innovations transfer and adaptation among cities and the timeline of public policy approaches towards informal settlements. It was attended by the faculty and students of IPPUR and across the entire campus.

Figure 21: A snapshot of the invite (left) and Dr. Perlman delivering the Opening Keynote at the Federal University of Rio.

4. SMART CITIES CONFERENCE, MIAMI

4.1.   Perlman's Presentation

I was a keynote speaker at the Smart Cities International Conference Miami, September 23, 2024.   The topic I was invited to address was: "Accelerating Urban Innovations from Ideas to Implementation." Most of the presentations focused on Artificial Intelligence -aided design of cities and buildings. The

speakers were predominantly older white male architects, engineers, and planners enamored with the hi-tech design tools. Nearly all presentations included stunning feats of design and omitted the human element. The slides did not even have humans in them. The enchantment with innovation for its own sake left little room for addressing Who the Innovations Serve.

MCP's people-oriented message was a provocation I proposed an alternative vision for building future-ready cities, focusing on the urgent need to address housing affordability amidst rapid urbanization and the housing crisis. Central to my presentation was the argument that informality—often dismissed as a problem—should instead be viewed as part of the solution to bridge the urban divide.

Drawing on the work of The Mega-Cities Project over 36 years, I emphasized the critical role of incorporating the wisdom, the productive capacity, the consumer value and the creativity of those who serve the city but are invisible. It is not smart to omit any place for the workers who keep the city running to live, learn and raise their families. Amid a group of impressive architects, engineers, and technology experts from all over the world showing futuristic urban fantasies, I contended that *"cities of the future will only be smart, innovative, resilient and future-ready if they consider who will live there and how they will live, rather than designing cool hi tech playgrounds for the elite.*

Figure 22: An impressive Magazine featuring 1000-word summaries of all presentations was produced in record time.

4.2. Smart City Miami - Magazine publication
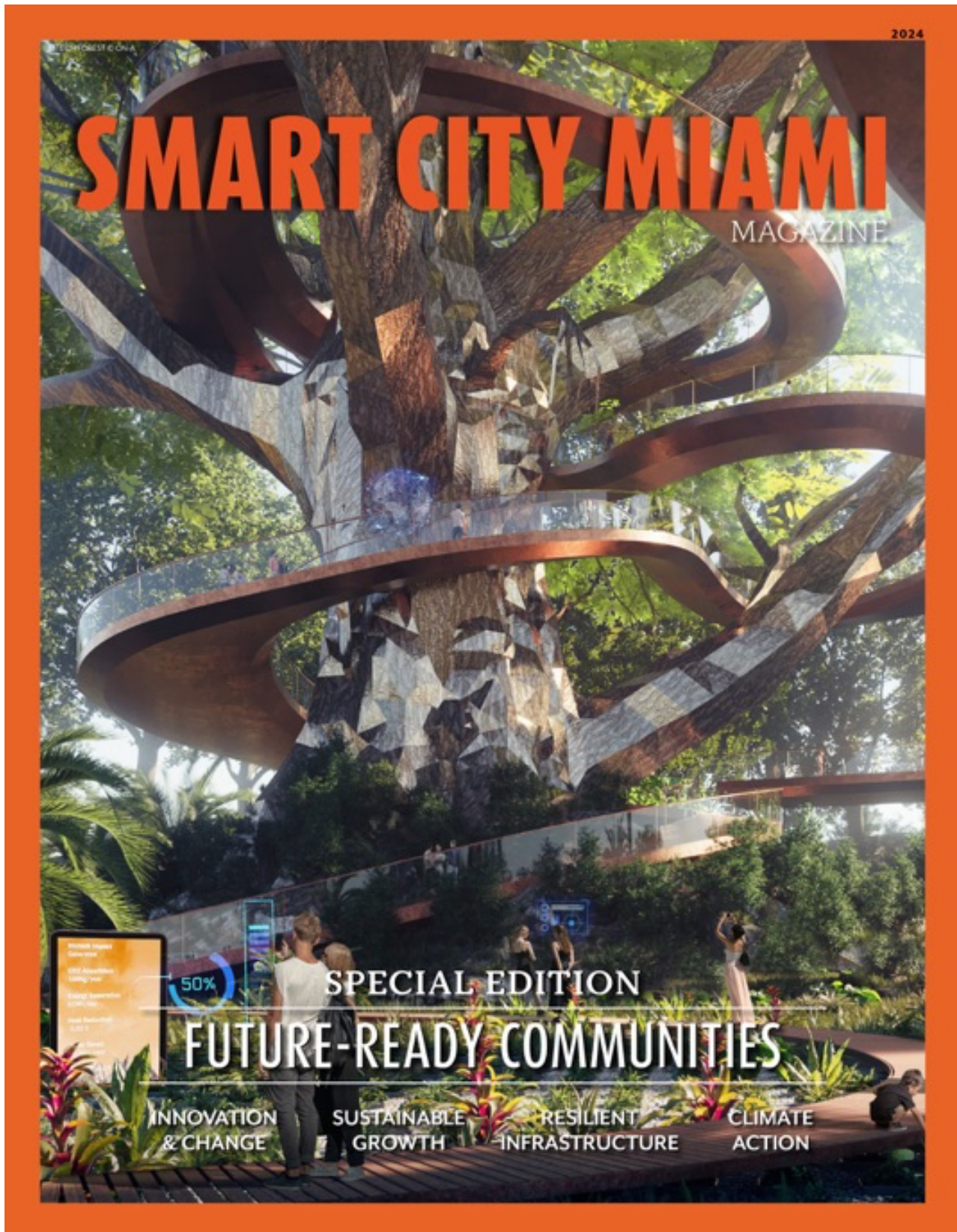
5. SIX DECADES OF BRAZILIAN DEMOCRACY AFTER THE MILITARY COUP

April 2024 marked sixty years since the 1964 military coup in Brazil—a pivotal moment in history that continues to reverberate in today's challenges to democracy. I was honored to be invited to be a speaker at the event "Memory & Truth: Brazilian Democracy Six Decades After the Military Coup" hosted by **Brazil Talk**, in partnership with the Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS), the Lemann Center for Brazilian Studies, the Afro-Brazilian Alliance, the Latin American Students Association, and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists at the Journalism School. Together with Vitor Hugo Brandalise and Aline Carvalho, I shared stories that have too often been silenced-- stories of individuals and groups deeply affected by the dictatorship. Through our collective efforts, these narratives have taken new forms as books, podcasts, and documentaries, ensuring they reach and resonate with a broader audience.

Figure 23: Student organizers did an excellent job.

We were joined by Roberto Simon, Rogerio Sottili, Iman Jadallah, and Cristiano Rodrigues, who highlighted how the echoes of the past inform the democratic risks we face across the Americas today. One year after the events of January 8th, this conversation underscored how memory is not just a look back but a crucial act of resistance against coups of the present and future. This student-organized event had speakers in person and speaking from Brazil. I was one of the only presenters who had been actively involved with university students and faculty in the lead-up to the coup. And I had already done field research in rural fishing and agricultural villages in the Northeast state of Bahia (1963). My research in Rio's favelas was carried out at the height of the dictatorship – 1968-'69- after the 5th Institutional Act. The full event was recorded and is available at [this link](#).

Figure 24: Interviewed after my presentation.

6. NY WOMEN'S FOUNDATION HONORS THE "FOUNDING MOTHERS".

I was honored as one of the "Founding Mothers" of the NYWF in 1986. With Helen Hunt, Gloria Milliken, Lola Redford and a few others, we launched an organization in which women of wealth might support women and girls in underserved communities. We adapted the methodology of the Mega-Cities Project, which was in its own formative stage, to identify grassroots organizations and leaders. The idea was to transform not only the grantee partners but also the donors who would go to the neighborhoods themselves, meet the people and witness the inspiring work being done.

In December, The New York Women's Foundation celebrated its 30th Neighborhood Dinner and celebrated its impact as a trailblazer in supporting grassroots, women-led organizations across New York City.

Figure 25: Founding Mothers (first row, right); Rainbow Coalitions at every table (second row, left); Current grantee-partners - future board members (second row, right)

Ana Oliveira, the President wrote:

The Foundation's roots trace back to the vision of its "Founding Mothers" --a passionate group of women who came together in the spring of 1986 with a shared goal: to inspire New York City women to invest in grassroots organizations that uplift and empower women in their communities. This bold initiative has since evolved into a powerful force for change, transforming lives and neighborhoods throughout the city.

The 30th Neighborhood Dinner brought together its legacy and new leadership, showcasing the Foundation's ongoing commitment to supporting women leaders. This dinner celebrated the transformative power of grassroots women-led initiatives, the strength of collective investment on women's innovations, and the enduring legacy of The New York Women's Foundation.

7. ONGOING PROJECTS AND NEW INITIATIVES

Building on the research and outreach efforts made in 2024, the plan for the following year will be to follow up on two lines of existing work and add a new research exploration.

7.1. Ongoing Projects - Continuity

1. **Stanford University Libraries & Archives:** Ensuring the legacy of MCP's global work. During the first semester of 2024, we focused on creating a document that provides an overview and scale of the Janice Perlman & The Mega-Cities Project Archive, which is set to be housed at the Hoover Libraries and Archives at Stanford University. This document serves as a foundational step, detailing the archive's scope, structure, and content, including over six decades of research, action-research projects, urban policy contributions, and multimedia records.

   The next phase, planned for 2025, involves systematizing the entire archive to ensure it is fully organized and accessible before its formal submission. This process will include detailed mapping, indexing, and categorization to preserve and enhance the usability of this valuable collection for future scholars and practitioners.

2. **Life Cycle of Urban Innovations Research:** Making an original contribution to knowledge about the conditions under which innovations arise, grow, thrive and reach scale; or are coopted, de-railed, discontinued or oppressed.

   We will continue to explore the literature on innovation life cycle, will expand our search for information on the 26 innovations we found most resilient and will add 5-7 additional case studies. Based on the field visit to the Zabbaleen in Cairo we will be able to enrich that case.

We will partner with Nada El Sawy, an Egyptian American journalist in Cairo, who I brought with me to the Zabbaleen site.

7.2. New Initiatives - Looking Ahead in 2025

This year's achievements underscore the interconnectedness of our work, from local community projects to global urban policy discussions. As we look to 2025, we remain committed to leveraging these insights to shape more sustainable, inclusive, and innovative cities worldwide.

1. **Women's Leadership in Community Development**

    We intend to initiate exploratory research on a factor which originated from our life cycle analysis. We identified the crucial role of women's leadership and the importance of receiving moral, technical and financial support in expanding their impact 360 degrees. Research at Harvard has shown that bonds of friendship and trust across socio-economic levels are a powerful predictor of social mobility. Our intention is to do exploratory research on this topic in two relevant geographies for MCP: Rio de Janeiro and New York City.

    We plan to interview grassroots women leaders and those who support them in two locations.

- In **Rio de Janeiro,** Perlman's research from 2006-2022 revealed a flourishing of unrecognized grassroots activity. Her unpublished writing "Hope and Defiance Below the Radar" reports on a wide array of women-led initiatives that are transformational. Many are led by collaborations of emerging young leaders and more seasoned organizers. Among the young leaders we will interview is Gizele Martins, from the favela complex of Maré, who received one of the 6 Emerging Leaders Awards from our Chair, James Hyman at Habitat III in Quito in 2016. She has now written her master's thesis and will go on to do a PhD, while still engaged in local leadership.

- In **New York City**, we will build on Dr. Perlman's role in the New York Women's Foundation, which he helped to create the same year as she created the MCP and embedded the same methodology of looking for promising innovations at the grassroots level. The major difference being that the NYWF concept was that women of wealth would invest directly in the wellbeing of women and girls in marginalized communities. Some of the original grantee partners from the neighborhoods are now members of the board and the committees that do the site visits and select the grantees. It will be very interesting to see how the respect and dignity that were granted has changed their worldview and prospects for the future. Not only are community women and organizations transformed but also the women philanthropists (who do the field visits and get to know the creative power of the community leaders) are themselves transformed in that process.

We are developing a Concept Paper for this 2-part initiative and have scheduled meetings with Foundation Program officers to assess the feasibility of submitting a full grant proposal for this research.

APPENDIX

Innovation Life Cycle Research Rationale and Methods

The Mega-Cities Project has a long history of identifying, documenting, and transferring urban innovations that address complex challenges in the world's largest cities. Since the mid-1980s, MCP has cataloged over 450 system-challenging innovations developed at the grassroots level or through multi-sectoral partnerships. The transfer of these innovations to urban communities facing similar obstacles jump-starts their implementation in the new context. The goal of this investigation is to determine the factors that contributed to the success or failure (scaling up or dissipating) of the urban innovations we have uncovered since our inception in 1988. We aim to discover what drives meaningful change and what barriers must be overcome to guide future work in the area.

Why does this matter? Our work goes beyond academic investigation; it is about finding effective shortcuts to improving lives, enhancing urban resilience, and fostering a culture of innovation that can adapt and evolve with society's needs. By understanding the full lifecycle of urban innovations—from inception to implementation and beyond—we can offer a blueprint for future initiatives that can replicate or scale successes and avoid past pitfalls. By creating this legacy, we can help pave the way for innovations to thrive in cities worldwide. This is uncharted territory. For over 35 years our local teams have been using the world's mega-cities (those with populations of 10 million or more) as the living laboratory for workable solutions to the daunting urban problems they all face. We know of no other organization that has consistently identified, documented, and shared successful urban initiatives over such an extended period.

Untold funds have been spent creating databases with categories of innovations and solutions or giving awards to city governments for projects. Still, almost none of the funding or recipient agencies has followed up to learn why these expensive databases don't work or what happened to the self-nominated Mayor's Awards with changes in the administration. This makes our analysis of our longitudinal work a unique opportunity to pass on the learnings to emerging leaders. We are not just documenting history; we are creating a legacy of knowledge and inspiration for the next generation of urban innovators.

Progress to Date:

The life cycle research, initiated in October 2023, seeks to unpack and understand the conditions under which urban innovations are born and how they have fared from their inception to our documentation of them in the 1990s and early 2000s and since then to their current state. We examined how those

innovations identified and transferred by MCP evolved over the past decades, the factors contributing to their success or discontinuation, and the strategies that facilitated their transfer to other cities or into public policies. Of the over 450 innovations in MCP's archive, 26 were selected for this study due to their more robust documentation in MCP's files. Five of these were chosen for in-depth case studies, providing detailed insights into their trajectories and outcomes.

Scope of Life Cycle Research

- **Archival Review**: Analyzed physical and digital MCP records to map the universe of innovations and help select the most documented ones.
- **Selection of Innovations**: Chose 26 of the innovations based on richness of documentation and potential for high impact.
- **Literature Review**: Analyzed physical and digital MCP records and a wide array of online sources to compile a snapshot of each innovation's trajectory.
- **Case Studies**: Did deeper investigation on five selected innovations, including Women's Police Stations (São Paulo), Remunerated Reforestation (Rio de Janeiro), Asha Health Cooperative (Delhi), Magic Eyes Anti-Littering Campaign (Bangkok) and Zabbaleen Community Development (Cairo).
- **Stakeholder Mapping and Contacting**: Updated contacts with original MCP coordinators and innovation product champions for potential online interviews. Reached out to MCP coordinators and stakeholders to see whether they had kept files on and followed the trajectories of the innovations.
- **Preliminary Analysis**: Identified initial patterns and factors influencing innovation outcomes, such as the role of institutionalization and community involvement.

Next Steps—innovation life cycle

- Check availability of information on 5 more promising innovations: Banana Kelly (The Bronx, New York), Alert II (São Paulo), Surface Metro (Curitiba) Mobile Creches (Delhi) and City Harvest (New York),
- If enough information is available online, explore 16 others we identified as promising.
- Identify and analyze patterns that contribute to the success or failure of these initiatives.
- Write up the findings and lessons for scaling and sustaining urban innovations globally. Disseminate as a Monograph, send to Stanford Archives and seek publication in an appropriate journal

The analysis indicates that some innovations survived and expanded and were adapted elsewhere through the Mega-Cities Project's deliberate exchanges and network, while others spread through existing channels of dissemination and imitation. Further research would also analyze how the transfers facilitated by MCP impacted the life cycle of the innovation itself.

In summary, this report helped to provide an initial understanding of the life cycle of system-challenging urban innovations that originate from local experiences. Analyzing the successful approaches identified by local MCP teams in 14 of the world's largest cities, based on research conducted from the mid-1980s through to the early 2000s, we started to track the trajectories of these social innovations to the present day (2024). By examining the internal and contextual factors of these innovations, we were able to draw initial insights into why some innovations grew, thrived, and scaled up into public policy, while others were co-opted, discontinued, or destroyed by conflicting interests. Additionally, we provided a preliminary description of how some initiatives were transferred and adapted elsewhere through MCP's network and deliberate exchanges, while others were disseminated and imitated through existing channels. Ultimately, our goal is to identify the factors that contributed to these diverse outcomes, contributing to the global interest in understanding the life cycle of urban innovations and informing future ingenious efforts to respond to challenges in cities worldwide.

In closing, we reflect on the seminal article "A dual strategy for deliberate social change in cities," that was published in the CITIES Journal in 1990. The intervening 34 years have not negated the need for transformational change in cities nor eliminated the value of nurturing home-grown innovations. There is still much work to be done.

We will end with the quote:

"The bottom line is a concern for the wellbeing of the 313.56 million citizens of megacities in the year 2000, and with the way cities will work for all of their residents in the 21st century. If we are to turn around the sense of hopelessness and despair about these large urban agglomerations, what is required is not simply a set of interesting ideas that happen to work in one context, but the cumulative effect of these ideas in enabling us to rethink the cities of the future. Given the deeply vested interests in the status quo, how can we find the political will for urban transformation in a non-revolutionary situation? Norman Myers states: 'The management of city problems cannot be separated from wider issues - of income distribution (both between social groups and between nations), the international economy, sustainable development, and human values. There may well be many innovative schemes to improve life in cities, but they are nearly all hinge on… cities having the resources, and the wills.'

It is in this light that Andre Gorz' concept of "non-reformist reforms" or transitional reforms is particularly helpful. Gorz discusses the struggles between workers and owners, and alliances between palliative

reforms which are often simple material possessions, and transitional reforms which change the rule of the game. For example, a one-time pay increase might be easily eaten up by inflation, but the right to a closed shop with collective bargaining permanently alters the logic of the worker-owner relationship. Manuel Castells has pointed out that the equivalent in urban struggles would be the difference between a tenant getting a landlord to agree to pay for a long-needed boiler repair or having the tenants' union enforce the principle that any time a major repair was needed, rents could be paid into a tenant-controlled escrow account for that purpose.

In urban policy studies, the analogy is clear. Some innovations may be intriguing in and of themselves and could help to improve the quality of life if more widely diffused. Others, like the decentralization of budgetary, zoning, land-use, and service delivery decisions to the neighborhood level, or the granting of equity shares to local community residents in large-scale private sector development projects, may have profound consequences. They would be transitional reforms.

Throughout history cities have been the crucibles of culture and the source of major advances of civilization. The boldness of our quest for deliberate social change and the transformation of urban practices (from the neighborhood level all the way to city, national, and international levels) is at the heart of whether we continue to project 19th century solutions onto tomorrow's world or finally make the leap to the 21st century city."

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