

Megacities, mega hot spots

Second Summer Academy on social vulnerability and megacities

A panel of internationally renowned experts met at Schloss Hohenkammer, Germany, from 22–28 July 2007 to discuss solutions for dealing with the increasing challenges faced by megacities. The title of the workshop was “Megacities: Social vulnerability and resilience building.”

Megacities will increasingly be a source of instability, liable to have major impact on the economy of entire countries.

According to the United Nations, the world has reached a turning point at which its urban population is beginning to exceed that of its rural.

Knowledge of the relationships between people, resources and cities – megacities in particular – will determine the future of many of the world’s countries. The topicality of this issue prompted the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) and the Munich Re Foundation to host the second Summer Academy on Social Vulnerability at Hohenkammer near Munich, Germany. The Academy focused on the development of new approaches to the security and resilience of social systems in megacities. Vulnerability experts, including politicians, internationally renowned experts and 25 exceptional young professionals from universities throughout the world, convened to address threats that are critical to the stability of urban conurbations. PhD candidates from Austria, China, Colombia, India, Iran, Japan, Mexico, the Philippines, Tanzania, Turkey, the UK, the USA and Germany took part.

Megacities – cities with more than ten million inhabitants – are growing at a much faster rate in the developing world. The contradictory forces of globalisation and the exploitation of both human and natural resources each play a part in the spread of slums and poverty that blights megacities at the current time. The Summer Academy participants addressed these dilemmas in working groups and panels of experts.

Munich, 31.07.2007
Page 1 of 3

Munich Re Foundation
Königinstraße 107
80802 München, Germany

Telephone +49 (0)89 / 38 91-88 88
Fax +49 (0)89 / 38 91-7 88 88
info@munichre-foundation.org
www.munichre-foundation.org

Letters: 80791 München, Germany

Chairman of the Board of Trustees:
Dr. Hans-Jürgen Schinzler
Chairman of the Foundation:
Thomas Loster

One million dwellers to be displaced from Asia's largest slum

Munich, 31.07.2007
Page 2 of 3

During the Summer Academy, participants examined real-life cases, including the megacity of Mumbai, formerly known as Bombay. Mumbai is home to more than 18 million inhabitants. It is the largest city in India and increases by approx. 1,000 people per day due to migration from poor rural areas throughout the country. Most of these new urban dwellers first settle in the slum area of Dharavi – the melting pot of Mumbai, and arguably Asia's largest slum. Today it claims over one million dwellers in a jumble of shacks and makeshift structures. Due to the breakneck speed of Mumbai's growth, Dharavi – once swampland on the city's outskirts – now lies at the heart of the high-powered metropolis. The area has become prime real estate and plans are in progress to demolish the slum dwellings. The inhabitants of this sprawling shanty town, where up to 18,000 people are crammed into one square acre of polluted land, will soon lose their homes, thus aggravating the social tensions in Mumbai. This situation reflects the fate of countless inner cities and fringe areas of megacities that are home to hundreds of millions of people. Slum areas gradually progress from poverty to working-class affluence – but do they have sufficient time to achieve sustainable progress in a globalised world impatient for overnight development? Failing to answer this question will breed conflict, unrest and migration.

Megacity Resilience Framework

The Megacity Resilience Framework, formulated by participants at the Summer Academy, describes a way of overcoming the increasing challenges mentioned above. The key features of this Framework, discussed at Hohenkammer with the Mayor of Kolkata, India, Mr. Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharyya, are:

1. Balancing local and global interests
2. Balancing formal and informal sectors
3. Balancing social and ecological interests.

The Framework indicates a way to build megacities which provide space and opportunities for everyone, not just the wealthy few.

Quotes from the Summer Academy

Munich, 31.07.2007
Page 3 of 3

Janos Bogardi, Director of UNU-EHS and Vice Rector ad interim of the United Nations University, pointed out that “urban areas pose a special challenge for human security in the developing and developed world. Nowhere can discrepancies between the haves and the have-nots be more clearly observed than in megacities. These discrepancies can lead to social tensions that, due to the sheer number of people living in a confined space, demand careful management”.

Úrsula Oswald-Spring, Universidad Nacional Autónoma of Mexico (UNAM) and former environment minister in Mexico, continued: “Megacities in developing countries bring with them new threats, including crime and the difficulty of coping with natural hazards. However, megacities also offer millions of people the chance to earn a better living, to strengthen their networks.”

Hans-Georg Bohle of the University of Bonn, acting holder of the MRF-UNU Chair on Social Vulnerability specialising in poverty and resilience, added: “Do not forget about the rural areas where living conditions are in many cases even worse than in the megacities. The poorest, and often illiterate, parts of the rural population have little prospect of moving into the cities where a better life may await them. This is because the rural poor have neither the means to travel nor the networks to accommodate them in the cities.”

Tom Downing, a Stockholm Environment Institute scientist looking at climate and adaptation at the Institute’s premises at Oxford in the UK, noted: “Vulnerability spans the physical environment and socio-institutional processes. Its realisation in megacities should concern us all, from researchers to decision-makers and, not least, the vulnerable themselves.”

Tony Oliver-Smith, an anthropologist from the University of Florida, explained: “Reducing vulnerabilities and achieving resilience should

consider the diversity of spaces and groups in a megacity. Resilience should also balance the costs of the measures taken against the beneficial outcomes in the reduction of vulnerability.”

Munich, 31.07.2007
Page 4 of 3

Mayor Bhattacharyya said: “In my country, slum settlements are an immense concern. We need to improve the lives of all. I am grateful that the Summer Academy is supporting us in finding answers to difficult questions.”

In his closing address to the Academy, Thomas Loster, Chairman of the Munich Re Foundation, stated: “Today, 12 of the 15 largest cities are in the developing world. In a globalised world, the problems of developing countries will become our own problems faster than we might imagine. We need to act now and strive for solutions.”

Appendix

Munich, 31.07.2007
Page 5 of 3

The Munich Re Foundation

The Munich Re Foundation, set up by one of the world's leading reinsurers, Munich Re, began its work in April 2005. Its central objective is to serve people at risk according to the motto "From Knowledge to Action". The foundation addresses major challenges of our time: disaster prevention, environmental and climate change, water, population growth, urbanisation and poverty.

Homepage: www.munichre-foundation.org

The United Nations University (UNU)

The United Nations University (UNU) was founded in 1973 to provide a forum for science to address pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare. With headquarters in Tokyo, the UNU has a worldwide network of institutes and training centres, including the Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) in Bonn, established in 2004.

Homepage: www.unu.edu and www.ehs.unu.edu

Further information and contact person

Thomas Loster
Chairman of the Munich Re Foundation
Telephone: +49 (0) 89/38 91-88 88
E-mail: info@munichre-foundation.org