OLD BOTTLE, NEW WINE?
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & URBAN PLANNING

by

NG AIK LAN
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ABSTRACT
Remarkable leaps made in the capacity and significance of telecommunications have created a new
economic, social and socio-cultural system. Old ideas and assumptions about development, planning and
management of the modern, industrial city become less feasible as the new millennium approach. The
paper attempts to look at the overall effects of IT (information technology) development on future urban
planning. Study is classified under the different elements of urban planning- housing units, work units,
leisure units and infrastructure. Their inter-relationship will also be examined. The study is more interested
in whether existing urban fabric can meet the needs of future culture and society. If not, possible solutions
are examined. Study will focus on how the development of individual urban element can affect each other
under the impact of IT. City is made up of different urban elements rather than just one of them.

Paper is divided into two parts. Problems and potentials of modern urban planning is examined, taking Le
Corbusier's and Frank Lloyd Wright's industrial cities as examples. Comparison is made between those two
cities against William J. Mitchell's theory- City of Bits. The theory is built on the potentials of IT as an
economic and social tool. Subsequently, Singapore as an information city is analyzed. It is interesting to
know how Singapore, 'burdened' with characteristics of an industrial city, can be transformed into an
information city.

IT can revolutionize our lifestyles. A new culture is emerging; machines are fast becoming the extensions of
the human bodies. Indirectly, IT would modify our future city and its urban elements. The future society will
also be a home-centred one with self-sufficient housing units accommodating more intelligent and diverse
functions. At the macro-level, the overall urban planning and land use patterns may also be affected. Cities
are no longer centres of activities. Bus terminals may not be just transition zones. Individual urban elements
may be fully integrated with spaces overlapping.

Existing urban fabric can accommodate our future needs. It is possible to consider IT as an invisible tool,
which only needs cables or wiring, and map it onto an existing city fabric. However, the existing fabric must
have minimum decentralization. Singapore as an analysis explores these possibilities.

Dissertation Supervisor: Mr Philip Bay Joo Hwa
Title: Assistant Professor