

Urban Planning and Women's Informal Employment

Ray Bromley

WIEGO, Cape Town, March 2011

Urban planning has deep and ancient roots, but it didn't globalize till the nineteenth century, accompanying the Industrial Revolution and the high age of European empire and colonialism. It has continued through decolonization into the current age of global restructuring.

The globalization of urban planning was really the globalization of a Euro-American model based on the concepts of progress, development and modernity.

The globalized Euro-American model of the last 200 years has three phases

- Early modern (early 19th century till around 1909) – benevolent, redistributive, gender-balanced.
- Modernist – from the early 20th century till its global high-point in the 1950's – still continuing in many areas – hegemonic, scale and technology focused, displacing the old in favor of the new, and male-dominated.
- Post-modern – from the 1960's onwards, a shift towards pluralism, diversity, cultural awareness, and gender-balance, but constantly facing the pressures of modernism, and the modernists' quest to displace and replace.

Key post-modern ideas in urban planning

- Growing recognition of the value of cultural diversity, with its “Little Italys”, Chinatowns, ethnic restaurants and craft cultures;
- Festival marketplaces – visions of “vendor variety”, dynamizing formerly sterile mall environments;
- New urbanism: an anti-sprawl movement advocating walkable, livable neighborhoods at a human scale with cafes, pubs and other localized meeting-places;
- Community food security: the growing realization that health and diet are intimately inter-related, and that households must “take back control” from the agribusiness corporations.

Current priorities:

access to land, buildings & livelihood

- Best practices – document good examples, publish case studies, nominate for awards;
- Improve guidelines for creation of retail markets & micro-business incubators, using vacant lots and other public lands, and adaptively re-using large old buildings;
- Improve guidelines for associating small retailers & coops for internet marketing, bulk buying, publicity & contracting discounts;
- Appropriate technology designs for mobile, movable and fixed vending, outdoors and within large buildings, and adapted to different climates;

- Greater appreciation of periodicity & seasonality, and how to supply very irregular demands;
- Globalization of handicraft marketing opportunities, building on the “festival marketplace” idea and especially targeting international events, tourist & recreational sales;
- Greater emphasis on sustainability and alternative energy sources, and the degree to which these facilitate the decentralization of economic activity to small enterprises;
- More focus on sanitation, solid waste disposal, composting and recycling – key headaches for planners.