

THE DIFFERENCE AN ALLIANCE BETWEEN GRASSROOTS SOLUTIONS AND ARCHITECTURE CAN MAKE

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In the modern metropolis, successful urban politics is largely based on temporary alliances. Cities, particularly megacities, have become too complex to be governed by the more traditional top-down approach. Moreover, in these ever-expanding urban landscapes, it has become increasingly important to foster and nurture urban grassroots projects that seek to improve the livelihood of cities' inhabitants. Evidence indicates that such small grassroots projects can successfully serve as blueprints for larger, more far-reaching

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initiatives. With guidance from influential public personas or entities, the core concepts of these smaller projects can be expanded or adjusted, in an effort to address the challenges of urban life in rapidly growing megacities.

It was this realisation that served as the stepping stone for the initiation of the Deutsche Bank Urban Age (DBUA) Award, which recognises exemplary locally organised projects designed to improve the urban environment, and in turn, the quality of life of residents. As such, the award can be viewed as a means to facilitate those grassroots projects that seek creative solutions to the everyday problems that confront a large portion of the world's city-dwelling population.

Established in 2007, the DBUA Award has been presented in Mumbai, São Paulo, Istanbul, Mexico City, Cape Town, Rio de Janeiro, and New Delhi. The aim of the award is to make the invisible visible, to unveil urban potential in the slums, townships, barrios, gecekondular, or favelas, and to constitute a lobby for those who have never had one.

Seven years, seven cities, and hundreds of community initiatives later, doubts about contemporary urban planning practices have begun to surface. It is time for

urban practitioners to develop new processes based on the experiences of community initiatives. To enable this process, the Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft has started the urbanxchanger project in which practitioners can learn from community initiatives, and vice versa, and in which actors from the Global North can learn from actors from the Global South.

It is my firm belief that grassroots projects, if executed properly and carefully, have the potential to not only fundamentally improve the quality of life in the neighbourhoods in which they are initiated, but also in other environments. Their immense societal value must first be recognised, of course, before they can be utilised as a blueprint for similar, larger initiatives. Moreover, I strongly believe that these grassroots projects have a vast and untapped potential for bringing peace and social harmony to cities around the world.