



The quest to become a world city: Implications for access to water



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 5 November 2013

Received in revised form 2 April 2014

Accepted 28 April 2014

Keywords:

World city

Urban development plans

Social inequality

Water provision

Hyderabad

Johannesburg

ABSTRACT

The ambition to be recognized as a 'World City' or 'Global City' is rapidly increasing not the least among cities in the global south such as Hyderabad in India and Johannesburg in South Africa. While such a status seems promising for attracting foreign capital and for expanding the economic potential of urban areas, it may have adverse impacts on the hinterland and contribute to growing urban inequality. Therefore, in this paper, the government initiatives inspired by world-city visions in Johannesburg and Hyderabad are analyzed in order to explore the social and environmental implications of the rhetoric around becoming a world city. By demonstrating the disparity in water access, the paper argues that the promises of city development plans in terms of social integration and 'world-class service' provision for all citizens, have not been fulfilled. Instead, the narrative of world-class cities in Hyderabad and Johannesburg open new avenues for the accumulation of wealth among the financial and political elite. Hence, the quest to become world cities will likely exacerbate the inequality gap within urban areas in the two cities.

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Introduction

In the age of globalization, and as a means to boost their current and future image, many cities have adopted the notion of 'world city' or 'global city' in their strategic planning documents (Flowerdew, 2004; Paul, 2004; Robinson, 2002). Such cities are often described as places of exceptional wealth and affluence because they serve as important nodes of the global economy by hosting high-tech industries, advanced financial services and revitalized craft production (Brenner, 1998; Sassen, 2003). Thereby world cities often host headquarters of firms and corporations, especially of those operating globally, which all require advanced services and telecommunications facilities to implement and manage global economic operations such as accounting, banking, finance, insurance, and advertising (Brenner, 1998; Sassen, 2002, 2003; Taylor, 2001).

The narrative of becoming a world city often emphasizes the involvement of the private sector in creating a "good business climate" to attract decisive trans-national and global finance capital (Brenner, 1998; Flowerdew, 2004). Strategies for stimulating world city development aim at boosting the national economy and that of the region as well as enhancing the quality of life for citizens, especially through improvement in the quality and provision of services and infrastructure. Table 1 shows some examples of the cities that

have adopted a world city image in their urban development plans including the necessary actions to achieve that goal.

The development strategies of these cities often open with the message that "no country has ever achieved sustained economic growth and rapid social development without urbanization" (UN-HABITAT, 2010). Regardless of the geographical location, the criteria for becoming an industrialized and culturally vibrant metropolis are, most often, based on the ideal model of Western world cities such as New York and London (Flowerdew, 2004; Lemanski, 2007). To attract international investment, create more job opportunities and enhance city infrastructures are therefore common denominators in the aims of these city development strategies (ibid).

Despite the growing popularity of aspiring to become a world city, there are empirical evidence that world cities are as vulnerable to developmental, environmental and social problems as any other city (Lemanski, 2007; Ng & Hills, 2003). Creating a "business-friendly" climate and offering world-class services is a land, energy and water intensive process, and it imposes enormous pressures on the hinterland. For example, municipal and industrial water uses in developing countries are predicted to double between 1995 and 2025, while the use of water for irrigation may increase by only 4% (HDR, 2006). With unprecedented rates of urbanization and increased economic activities, many cities rely heavily on the long-distance transfer of water from beyond the city boundaries (Lundqvist, Appasamy, & Nelliyyat, 2003). This has imposed major social and environmental challenges both on the hinterland and within cities (ibid).

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Table 1
Examples of world cities aspirations in the public policy circle.

City vision/slogan	Strategic planning document
New York: <i>A leading world city by promoting exchange among policymakers and citizens...</i>	Preliminary Ten-Year Strategy: Fiscal Years 2002–2011 (The City of New York, 2002)
Singapore: <i>A vibrant global city</i>	Concept Plan 2011 (Urban Redevelopment Authority, 2001)
Hong Kong: <i>A leading city in Asia – Asia's World City</i>	Bringing the Vision to Life (Central Policy Unit, 2000)
Kuala Lumpur: <i>A world-class city</i>	Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 (Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 2003)
Johannesburg: <i>World-class African city</i>	Growth and Development Strategy 2040 (Coj, 2006)
Hyderabad: <i>An emerging world class city</i>	Hyderabad City Development Plan (GHMC, 2006b)

In addition, the disproportionate concentration of very high and very low-income jobs in world cities, caused by transnational corporations' dual need for a class of professionals and a class of low skilled labor, has been intertwined with social polarization and growing inequality ([Sassen, 2004](#)). In parallel to their rapid economic growth and like other aspiring world cities in Asia – such as Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Manila – Hyderabad in India and Johannesburg in South Africa are among the most unequal cities in the world ([UN-HABITAT, 2013](#)). Unequal access to education, health and public services such as water and electricity has hindered opportunities for low-income households to raise their living standards (*ibid*). Importantly, being poor in an urban setting dramatically increases the likelihood of having access only to unimproved water sources and thereby being exposed to far greater health risks ([HDR, 2006](#)).

Given all these challenges in the quest to become a world city, the research presented herein analyzes the social and environmental implications of the processes of 'world-city making'. In doing so, the research builds on a dual case-study design including Johannesburg in South Africa and Hyderabad in India – two cities in newly industrialized countries with fast-growing economies (BRICS). These examples represent different social and historical settings while sharing certain characteristics, such as the unequal distribution of income, resources and services. In both cities, the aim of becoming a dynamic big city has been encouraged by governments. For example, the City of Johannesburg in South Africa runs a campaign centered on the concept of "world class African city" ([Coj, 2012b](#)), while local officials in Hyderabad, in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India, promote city development projects under the banner of "emerging world class city" ([TNIE, 2012](#)). While in both countries, the formal constitutional democracy has been consolidated, there is little evidence of active engagement of subordinate groups in shaping public policy ([Heller, 2009](#)). Social inequalities, in both examples, have increased in the last decade along with accelerated economic growth ([ADB, 2012](#); [Heller, 2009](#)). Considering this, the world-city initiatives in each of the two cities acknowledge the importance of promoting economic development while increasing social integration ([Coj, 2006](#); [JNNURM, 2005](#)). The accompanying urban plans and water policy is, thus, envisioned to be shared in a way that enables all citizens to have access to world-class services (*ibid*).

By analyzing these plans and policies, the paper investigates how the city visions translate into action. Albeit the provision of water services is in focus here, sanitation or electricity could have been equally important research objects. Water is not only essential for life in general but vital for any prosperous city ([UN-HABITAT, 2013](#)). In the analysis to follow, the paper seeks to answer the questions below:

- How is the world city image translated into city development plans and into the governance of water services in Johannesburg and Hyderabad?
- To what extent have world-city promises been met in the water sector?
- Why is there a gap between the promised and the offered world-class services?

Correspondingly, the paper examines in what direction the water sector is developing and how different actors play a role in the process of water provision under world-city initiatives. Furthermore, the paper discusses the mechanisms and underlying forces behind the challenges.

Methodology

The paper builds on a dual-case study design to concentrate upon a limited range of issues using the same analytical procedure and data collection methods in both cases ([Kuper, 2013](#)). This allows us to concentrate on a specific research focus, herein, the social and environmental implications of the quest to become a world city, in the context of the global South. A dual-case study design helps comparing more thoroughly how the subject matter unfolds in each setting; and to gain more in-depth knowledge of the studied phenomenon.

In identifying the main elements of the world-city image and exploring its emergence in the public policy circle, the paper draws on world city literatures ([Brenner, 1998](#); [Flowerdew, 2004](#); [Paul, 2004](#); [Roy, 2011](#); [Sassen, 1991, 2003, 2006](#); [Shatkin, 2007](#)). This process offers useful materials to analyze the characteristics of world cities, why they have become a popular narrative in city development plans and how the interplay of actors involved in the process of world city making is shaped.

In studying the translation of world city visions into city development plans and water governance policy, I examined urban development plans inspired by the world-city vision at the national, regional and local levels to identify the actors and governance practices involved in the process of water provision in the two cities. In addition, and to trace thoroughly any developments in the water sector, other forms of documents, such as memoranda, minutes of meetings, press releases, program proposals, and articles in scientific journals were analyzed.

In determining the impacts of world city initiatives in the water sector, the processes of extracting water for the cities and distributing it within them were examined. While the water extraction process was readily established, based on a combination of available primary data, such as government reports, and secondary data such as articles in newspapers and scientific journal articles, the water distribution in the cities was the main focus of the field research. In investigating water distribution and quality of services in these cities, a variety of data from official government reports, newspapers and scientific journals on the assessment of water provision was used and constructed. In Johannesburg, government reports were released annually by the municipality, and available on the city's website to the public ([Coj, 2006, 2008, 2011a, 2011b, 2012b, 2012a, 2013](#)). In Hyderabad, data were extracted from different chapters of city development plans provided by the municipality as part of an appraisal of the national urban renewal mission ([GHMC, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d, 2011](#); [JNNURM, 2006, 2011](#)). While the government reports evaluated the overall performance of the municipality and water companies, these assessments were not always in line with newspaper reports or articles in scientific journals. Hence, I compared and contrasted these data with primary data on modes of access and payment schemes.

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