

# ENERGETIC GERMAN CITIES

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The 21st century is a century of cities. Cities are engines of economic development and sources of innovation. Bigger metropolises are developing towards being more powerful than many national states. Yet the biggest potential for finding answers to environmental challenges lies also in cities. What should be the role of states in supporting urban development and solving these central issues? In Germany, people are convinced that developing a national urban policy in cooperation with city-boroughs, states and several organisations is essential, because the success of the *Bundesrepublik Deutschland* is dependant of the welfare of the cities. It is especially important to make the problems of urban development public and to foster discussion. To work towards this goal, a series of urban policy conferences have been held in Berlin since 2007.

While the first meetings were more general in their approach, the conference held in Berlin<sup>1</sup> in November 2012 focused on the subjects of **environment and saving energy**, as the issue of an economy based on lower CO<sub>2</sub> consumption is seen to be one of the most influential processes in urban development. Of course these questions can't be answered in isolation, thus it is important to connect the sustainability discussion with other issues in the social and

1. [nationale-stadtentwicklungspolitik.de/cln\\_032/nn\\_251556/EN/UrbanEnergies/urban\\_energies\\_node.html](http://nationale-stadtentwicklungspolitik.de/cln_032/nn_251556/EN/UrbanEnergies/urban_energies_node.html)



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economic sphere, which need to be solved in order to develop wholly integrated strategies of urban development. The title of the conference, '**Urban Energies**' (*'Städtische Energien'*), referred to the debate surrounding energy consumption through different, often catalysing energies in urban development. For example, the social energy that comes from communication or the innovative, fresh energy of youth are alternate ways of seeing energy.

The ambition to influence urban policies in the whole Europe is not hidden from national policy development Germany. Accordingly, the conference this year was exceptionally international and included audience and speakers from several continents. The stage was taken by the true superstars of urbanism.

**Saskia Sassen**, professor at Columbia University, spoke about the need to open and discover the potential of cities, which comes from the connection of people with space. According to Sassen, it is important that people have the opportunity to form a relationship with space and to own it. Sometimes gathering is needed to manifest our presence in space. At other times, individual actions are enough to create shared benefits – for example when you walk in a dangerous park with your dog the park will become safer for everyone.

**Jaimie Lerner**, the former mayor of Curitiba, Brazil, presented about how his city became one of the success stories of urban development. This was a truly engaging and humorous one man show that drew parallels between a mother-in-law and a car, both of which will rule your life once they have settled in with you. The fact is that for today, the 'on land metro' has spread into more than 120 cities across the world.

Former mayor of Bogotá, **Enrique Peñalosa**, who since 2009 also belongs to the Board of Directors<sup>2</sup> of the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy<sup>3</sup> in New York, tied questions of mobility with issues of social justice. He emphasised that finding solutions to traffic problems is not a technical, but a political question. We just need to understand that one bus with 100 people has a 100 times bigger right for the street space than one car, and a person on a 30 dollar bike is an equal to the person in a 30 000 dollar car. For this reason, Bogotá started investing into roads starting from bicycle lanes and pedestrian access.

The conference took place in the **House of World Cultures** (*Haus der Kulturen der Welt*) in the Tiergarten district that was noteworthy in the context of the topic because there is no parking around the building. All participants were encouraged to use public transport to get there.

THE AUTHOR OF THE ARTICLE PARTICIPATED IN A CONFERENCE 'URBAN ENERGIES' DURING 11<sup>TH</sup>-12<sup>TH</sup> OF OCTOBER IN 2012 IN BERLIN.

2. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institute\\_for\\_Transportation\\_and\\_Development\\_Policy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institute_for_Transportation_and_Development_Policy)

3. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Board\\_of\\_Directors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Board_of_Directors)

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