

### 3.4.1 Megacities as Risk Areas – Theories and Scales of Vulnerability and Resilience

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Megacities are seen as one of the major challenges of contemporary global urbanisation (Kraas 2010). Due to their concentrations of daunting numbers of people, their unprecedented growth rates, their complexities and dynamism, and not least due to their harsh socio-economic fragmentation, there are concerns about an expected loss of urban governability, the uncontrolled spread of informality, and the inexorable increase of social marginalisation, deprivation and vulnerability (Kraas 2008). One focus of the SPP was to shed light on the manifold risks and the diverse vulnerabilities that are emerging for different people in today's megacities. With a focus on Dhaka in Bangladesh and on Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Dongguan in China, the overarching questions considered by these studies were:

What risks have emerged in contemporary mega-cities in Bangladesh and China, and for whom are they relevant?

What are the structural factors behind these risks, and what drivers shape the manifold courses of respective risk governance strategies?

How do different socio-economic groups and actors perceive these risks? How do they handle them? And what factors hinder them from successful adaptation in the long run?

So far, the global challenge of megacities has often been discussed from a macro-perspective. In these cases the discussion has been reduced to questions of cities' population size and growth rates, or to their exposure to natural hazards and available funds for adaptive measures. Questions of access, distribution and participation have been left widely disregarded. In contrast to such 'de-politicised' standpoints, SPP scholars followed a micro-perspective on the subject matter and developed alternative approaches that place special emphasis on the social construction of risks (Etzold 2013; Hackenbroch 2013a; Hossain 2013b) and on people's resilience (Bercht 2013a; Aßheuer 2014; Keck 2016). While the notion of vulnerability serves to identify potential threats to people's livelihoods and their wellbeing, the concept of resilience aims to understand the capacities and social mechanisms that help people to handle these threats, to preserve their belongings and (at best) to acquire knowledge and

resources that help them to deal with future threats more competently. In seven years of research, two facets turned out to be most vital in this regard: people's adaptive resilience, i.e. their ability to learn from past experiences and adjust themselves to future challenges to their everyday lives; and their transformative resilience, i.e. their ability to craft sets of institutions that foster individual welfare and sustainable societal robustness towards future crises (Keck/Sakdapolrak 2013). While adaptive resilience addresses the ways in which people adjust themselves to their respective environments, transformative resilience transcends this idea by highlighting measures of how people adjust their environments according to their needs (Keck 2015a). Against this background, SPP studies show that the challenge of megacities and the search for ways to build sustainable future cities – especially in support of the poor and marginalised – are not only technical, but first and foremost political issues.