Ian Banerjee

PASSION FOR THE TALE OF CITIES

After growing up in Asia, Africa and Europe, Ian Banerjee studied architecture and urban planning in Vienna and Brazil. He developed a passion for studying success stories of urban transformation, innovation ecosystems, and intangible aspects of urban life. His teaching and research activities revolve around future topics of urban planning with a focus on urban learning, platformization of cities, digital-social innovation, and the social impact of the AI revolution. He has gained experience in over forty cities worldwide. He is currently writing two books: a graphic novel called "ELEMENTS - The incredible story of the invention of science", and "Futures Thinking meets Storytelling - A visual guide to the methods and mental models of Foresight".

Key biographic moments

- After spending my childhood in Asia, Africa and Europe, I studied architecture and urban planning at the Technical University of Vienna (TU Wien). I wrote my Master's thesis on the planning principles of the city of **Curitiba**, branded as the 'Ecological Capital' of Brazil. The city is widely recognized as one of the most successful turn-around stories in contemporary urbanism. I conducted my field research in Curitiba (1999) in close cooperation with its main planning institute and think tank called *IPPUC*. The fieldwork in Curitiba and the experience of how a city could 'reinvent' itself in such radical ways became a life changing experience. I decided to commit myself completely to the study of **urban innovation.**

- For the last 25 years, I have been scanning the world for outstanding stories of urban transformation- looking at them from diverse angles - from mobility to economy, from digitalization to education (I coined the term **"educational urbanism"** in 2010). Field research and excursions to South-America, North America, Europe, the Middle-East and Asia deepened my global and local understanding of radical innovation in urbanism.

- Before joining academia, I worked as a consultant to Austrian Television **ORF** and German Satellite TV **3Sat** for five years (1999-2004). I worked on a series of large-scale documentaries on urban technologies- such as on water and waste management in megacities of the world. It took me to the frontiers of the many dramatic challenges of urbanisation. The encounters I had during this period gave me a broad understanding of the mind-sets of the actors and institutions necessary for urban innovation, and the wide varities of urban imagination.

- 20 years of academic life at the **Centre for Sociology** (at TU Wien, since 2008) sharpened my skills to apply the critical lenses of the social sciences. The projects and teaching courses I had been involved with mostly had an international orientation. Two formative projects I took part in during this period was: a) the development of the 40-year *National Spatial Strategy of Oman,* and b) an extensive study of how automated mobility may impact the cities of tomorrow (Avenue 21). In the latter project I studied the innovation policies of San Francisco, London, Gothenburg, Tokyo, and Singapore.

- My interest in future-related topics and educational innovation, made me acutely aware of how important it will be for nations to reimagine the role of education during the AI-revolution and climate change. Inspired by the international initiative of UNESCO to

mainstream "futures literacy" in secondary schools, I decided to commit myself to popularizing the methods of "futures thinking" in the tertiary educational sector.
I co-founded "Scenarios 2050" together with Philipp Krebs in 2025.

International exposure
Research, fieldwork or excursions have taken me to the following places: Brazil (Curitiba, Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Salvador de Bahia, Fortaleza); Japan (Tokyo, Kyoto); Singapore; China (Shanghai, Hong Kong, Hangzhou, Beijing); Ecuador (Quito); Colombia (Medellin); South Korea (Seoul); Georgia (Tbilisi, Batumi); USA (Chattanooga, New York, Atlanta); Oman (Muscat, Nizwa, Salalah, Ibri); India (Mumbai, Delhi, Chandigarh, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar); Spain (Barcelona, Bilbao); Vietnam (Hanoi), Denmark/Sweden (Copenhagen/Malmö); UAE (Dubai, Abu Dhabi); Georgia (Batumi, Tbilisi); Turkey (Istanbul); Morocco (Essaouira), Greece (Athens), Bulgaria (Plovdiv); Bosnia (Sarajevo).

My current interests: Urbanism, AI, futures thinking

Urbanism
I have a deep interest in studying stories of urban transformation with a focus on understanding how policies can enhance or curtail the innovation capacity of places and regions. In my 25 years of urban research and explorations I came in touch with 40 cities on four continents (such as Singapore, Mumbai, Shanghai, Tokyo, New York, Dubai, Muscat, Medellin, Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba…). My main interest was to study the policies, institutions and governance models of cities which display outstanding capacity *to continuously learn, solve problems, and innovate*. I found out that *people can create extraordinary places, but places can also create extraordinary people*. I also found out that intangible aspects of life such as hope, meaning, human relationships are mostly forgotten by planners, but play a powerful role in the life or death of cities.

AI-Revolution
The unfolding AI revolution has led me shift my interest to the new socio-technical aspects of urbanism. I want a) to understand the emerging potentialities of various forms of AI, b) to understand how social systems may be impacted by AI, c) to explore scenarios of how cities, institutions and communities can creatively respond to AI, and d) how to enhance the innovation and problem-solving capacity of cities and regions with the help of AI.

Futures Thinking
Against the background of the unprecedented disruptions of our times, I have developed a keen interest in the methods of foresight developed by think tanks and research institutions during the last 70 years. With our new course "Futures Thinking meets Storytelling", I want to inspire students to get more involved with the exciting question of how to shape our common futures in times of *huge potentials and deep uncertainties.*

Website: www.scenarios2050.com
Blog: www.futureskillsobservatory.wordpress.com