

# Pre-Conference Event:

## Managing the Unmanageable – Dabbawalas - Hidden Champions of Future Metropolises

### Thesis and Questions

Today we live in an urban age. More than half of the world's population lives in towns and cities, a number expected to rise to more than 60 percent by 2030. In developing countries, megacities absorb a big share of this urban growth. Among the manifold challenges caused by rapid urban development, a rising need for housing and an increased demand for the transport of people and goods are only some of the most pressing.

Supplying the megacity population with vital goods and services is a major quest, be it water, the collection of waste or the provision of other bare necessities – like food. In many urban areas of the south, local governments and administrations are unable to provide these on a regulated basis. This helplessness results in an overall loss of governability. As a consequence, cities very often rely entirely on informal economic arrangements and self-organisation of urban processes which take place completely beyond governmental control. In other words: they count on the creativity and self-help of their citizens.

Which new ideas, visions and models exist for liveable and well functioning urban growth centres? Is informality just an euphemism for mass unemployment, or do we have to accept higher degrees of self-organisation and tolerated illegality in megacities? Do we have to perceive official urban planning and informal solutions as contradictory? Or can the two strategies be harmonised for the sake of a more sustainable urban future?

And finally, what can western welfare states learn from third world examples?

### Who and What

#### Moderation and Instigator

Mr Ralf Ebert  
StadtArt  
Dortmund  
Germany

#### Film Screening

##### “Dabbawala – The Lunchbox Miracle” (award winning film)

The award-winning film by Ms Antje Christ (ChristMedia) follows the Dabbawalas of Mumbai through the chaotic megacity, in the footsteps of a logistic phenomenon that defies all western ideas of order.

In the wildly chaotic metropolis of 20 million, 5000 Dabbawalas deliver 200,000 lunches - homemade cooking for Indian employees, prepared by their own wives. The meals contained in the so called Dabbas, travel distances of up to 70 km through innumerable hands – on bicycles, trains, wooden carts and on heads. Virtually without error, the Dabbawalas' system

works. Only one in 16 million tins ever gets lost, even though most Dabbawalas are illiterate. The Dabbawalas in Mumbai embody traditional and modern life in one. Their method of delivery has hardly changed over time – despite the fact that Mumbai’s population has grown 20 fold. How do they manage not to lose track in one of the biggest cities of the world without computers or any other technical aids? Is the Dabbawala’s system possibly more than merely a logistics scheme? Is it perhaps a sophisticated social phenomenon that even highly developed industrial countries can learn something from?

### Welcome by

Prof Ulrich Radtke

Rector

University Duisburg-Essen, Germany

### Panellists

- Mr Raghunath Medge, President of the Mumbai Dabbawala Association, India and Mr Ram Venkatraman Ayyar
- Ms Antje Christ, Filmmaker, Cologne, Germany
- Prof. Frauke Kraas, Department of Geography, University of Cologne, Germany