

## The future of Megacities

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The first cultural achievement of man in society is the creation of the city. The etymology of the word civilisation (from the Latin *civis* = citizen) brings the evidence.

The city as a gathering of people with same habits and same interests was the shelter of the community against the dangers of the countryside (Athena Minerva as the goddess of the city and wisdom was the opposite of Artemis Diana the goddess of nature accompanied by beasts).

However the town in its actual aspect became itself a source of risks and uncertainties which nourish a widespread feeling of insecurity among city dwellers. The huge demographic size of the modern megapolis, the cultural and ethnic melting pot of its population, the difficulties to assuring and providing all essential goods and main services (food, housing, health, circulation, water distribution, energy, etc...) or the necessary facilities for a decent life (sociability's tools, hospitals, cultural and sport installations, green area, etc...) compromised the mission of the city as the main cultural centre. This lack of social cohesion elements makes obvious the vulnerability of urban life and structures. The black out of New York City, and its consequence as well as the frequent disturbances caused by strikes and marches of demonstrators (specially in the cities of our democratic Europe) can prove it! In this century of uncertainty, the non predictable risks affect mostly complex systems as those generated by megacities.

Looking back to the past it is amazing to think, that after the Middle Ages, the opening of Modern times in European history was initiated thanks to the creation of new kind of cities : they were at the same time administrative, military, political and ecclesiastical centres; they shielded commercial activities, notably markets supplied by the rural population of the surrounding, as well as the cultural life. They gave the impulse of innovation in all fields. Their population experienced then empowerment and freedom. "Stadt Luft macht frei" (the air of the city makes one feel free) was the motto of the cities of modern Europe.

Obviously the situation nowadays is almost reversed. The megacity with its working poor who represent with the immigrants (dwelling mostly in its outskirts) the so-called fourth world, in-



## APPENDIX

1. The world population has doubled in less than 100 years and will nearly double again in the next 100 years, in spite of all optimistic prediction for control. A challenging question is: If one had the power to decide where to locate 4 billion new people, how would one go about it? Would one distribute them within the existing inhabited world network or would one decide otherwise and with what criteria?

2. Urbanization: Almost 80% of the total population of the earth will be urbanized in the near future (not only in terms of location in urban areas but also in terms of patterns of life, etc.).

The shift will be dramatically rapid and enormous in Asia, Africa and Latin America - although major increases and shifts will continue in Europe (particularly due to migration) and North America (migrants shift of locals to the Sunbelt, and ageing wealthy people to California. Miami, etc.).

3. Based on past and present experience (and also on identified tendencies for the immediate future which become clear from investments in purchasing land and other political strategic and mainly economic reasons - as, for example, exploitation of resources), urbanization will take place:

- a) along major transportation lines and other parallel networks,
- b) along seashores and watersheds (the Great Lakes Megalopolis is proof of this), and also
- c) around the proximity of major urban concentrations.

This is dictated by all sorts of criteria, mainly historic, socio-economic, political, technological, etc, but mainly due to the scarcity of resources available to human beings such as time and energy which dictate proximity to promising centres in order to achieve maximum return with minimum effort in all senses.

4. So far this kind of development has of course created many positive aspects - whatever good humanity has achieved is related to this pattern. But it has also had a lot of negative impacts both

*outside urban* development and *within urban* developments, all very crucial and very vital, multiple in character (economic, social, political, administrative, technological and cultural):

a) Concerning outside urban settlements: since the beginning of time, urban expansion has taken place on very valuable fertile soil which has gradually become much more limited and with less qualities than the soils covered by buildings; or extreme consumption of energy needed for exploitation of leftover arable lands; or extreme increase in expenses for provision of water due to transfer over long distances, etc.

b) Within urban developments, we know the complexity of the existing systems, the enormous problems of transport and traffic, lack of general infrastructure, problematic administration and impossible management, breaking of the historic structure and harming rare resources of cultural improvement, etc. This is true everywhere both in the developed world and in the less developed parts of the earth, and conditions differ from case to case. All the above conditions are of course extreme in major urban developments of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where growth has reached such a scale recently and where there is no experience or heritage for handling phenomena at that level.

In conclusion what can be done for the mega-polis? First is the need for the study and identification of the existing structure which in all cases reveals the existence of territorial entities corresponding to various scales of community (from neighbourhood to pre-existing polis and even small metropolis from the merging of which the mega-polis developed), and the identification of territorial systems which satisfy to the maximum possible degree the daily needs of people (entities that differ from culture to culture, etc.).

Secondly, the need to facilitate the efficiency of organisation by distributing services according to the prevailing hierarchy in terms of education facilities (kindergarten, nursery school, primary school, secondary school, university, etc.) or market (corner shop, local market, broader commercial area) or, to come to networks, pedestrian roads, low-speed vehicle roads, high-speed roads.

Thirdly, the need for an innovative intervention with human friendly technological achievements

which render world progress accessible to everyone and familiarize people with high-tech achievements, and in this way the connection of technology with culture becomes possible.

This stresses the importance of a last point which is the need to look afresh at the texture of the existing development and the potential it offers for improvement of all kinds. This will help decision makers to identify principles developed and appreciated by local people through trial and error for centuries and use these principles for new developments.