Success of the City in the 21st Century: An introduction to the 2001 Symposion

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Foreword

Good morning to everybody!

Before starting, I would like to ask you for a minute of silence in memory of the members of our Society who have passed away since our last meeting: Wesley Posvar, the immediate Past President of the Society, Lord Butterfield of Stechford, Garrett Eckbo, Thomas Howarth, Arthur Scheepers, and Herbert Strawbridge.

Thank you!

The city in the 21st century: What is it all about?

Well, that could be a long story. To make it very short:

In the year 2000 we were 6.1 billion people on Earth. In the year 2050 we might be 9.4 billion, and in the year 2100 we could be 12.2 or only 9.2 billion. However that turns out, population growth will mean further urbanization, rapid urban growth particularly in the developing countries.

The city of the 21st century, therefore, will

• increase in numbers,
• expand in size,
• get more Southern...

Increase, Expansion, Southernization. If this is so – does it imply success or failure?

To quote our member Demosthenes Agrafiotis[1]:

The criterion of success or failure is not the solution to a problem or the answer to a question, but the test *(l'épreuve)* itself of the scientific fields, especially at their limits, by their limits, and beyond their limits!

Successful city, successful urban growth, successful human settlements: all these topics are old, and at the same time new.

Old, in at least two different ways:

• Old, regarding the Ekistics philosophy, for example, as one can read on the back cover of each issue of the journal *Ekistics, the Problems and Science of Human Settlements:*

Ekistics – The ancient Greek adjective οἰκιστικός meant: "concerning the foundation of a house, a habitation, a city or a colony; contributing to the settling." All these words grew from the verb οἰκίζω, "to settle," and were ultimately derived from the noun οἶκος, "house," "home" or "habitat"... The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary contains a reference to an oecist, oekist or oikist, defining him as: "the founder of an ancient Greek ... colony"... In addition, the adjectives ekistic and ekistical, the adverb ekistically, and the noun ekistician are now also in current use.

• Old, in a truly historic sense: Last week, I visited Regensburg, a beautiful old city (and once one of the centers of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation), going back to the first century of our era and developing around a Roman garrison of 6,000 men (served by 2,000 women). In the City Hall built in the 17th century, there is an impressive painting, which contains a message on "good urban policy," including five basic virtues for success of city development. These virtues are represented by figures of charming women in delightful mediaeval costumes: *Caritas, Justitia, Prudentia, Pax* and *Ceres* (fig. 1).

Again, there are at least two things about this painting which deserve special notice:

• The five virtues, these colorful women, are united by a rope symbolizing what we nowadays would probably call the need for integrated assessment and implementation – or the Ekistics framework.

• This picture has been part of the City Hall since 1663, when the "Immerwährender Reichstag," a permanent Imperial Assembly residing at Regensburg, came into being. The Holy Roman Empire ended in 1806. The picture, however, still dominates the City Hall of Regensburg – and it is a fascinating allegory...

If we are prepared to learn from the past when talking about the future, we might learn – I would underline: we *should* learn from that past...: *Caritas, Justitia, Prudentia, Pax* and *Ceres* – all of them still valuable criteria for successful urban development? Certainly so!

Of course, knowledge and science nowadays, in modern times, use different language. So, with your permission, we could call the mediaeval virtues predecessors of modern pol-

Fig. 1: Good urban government – Five basic virtues: Caritas, Justitia, Prudentia, Pax and Ceres. A painting by Isaac Schwendtner, 1592, in the City Hall of the historic city of Regensburg, Germany, since 1663.

icy criteria. But what then is *Caritas* in the language of modern planning, what are *Justitia, Prudentia, Pax,* and *Ceres?*

I must admit that I have not come across a convincing modern interpretation of those historical concepts. And, probably, it may be difficult to translate the old Regensburg wisdom into a kind of guidance for this year's Ekistics meeting in Berlin. One would need time to go into a serious comparative discussion of the issues. An interesting research topic, I think.

As this is so, I would like to draw your attention, instead, to a global agenda for 21st century cities, a book resulting from the work of the World Commission URBAN 21 and its Expert Group: *Urban Future 21. A Global Agenda for the Twenty-First Century Cities,*[2] edited by Peter Hall and Ulrich Pfeiffer and published by Alexandrine Press in 2000. The authors of that report speak of "urban essentials" and "dimensions of the sustainable city."

Urban essentials - Dimensions of the sustainable city

What are all the world's urban millions going to want in the 21st century? What will be their principal and most basic concerns?

The expert group started with what they called the most basic principle of all: sustainable urban development, a principle easy to state in general terms, much harder to operationalize in terms of everyday decisions. They quote the Brundtland report:

> Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable – to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

This means that we should not rob the generations that come after us; rather, we should seek to leave them a better legacy than we have had ourselves. The notion of sustainability holds good for several dimensions. From the start the term has been extended from the environmental sphere, with which many people associated it, to the economic, the social and the cultural dimensions of policy. A society could become richer in material terms yet poorer with regard to its quality of life. As Amartya Sen put it: "... a society or an economy can be Pareto-optimal and still be perfectly disgusting." It could become materially richer by mining non-renewable natural resources, it could enjoy affluence while producing global warming, which threatens the lives of all future generations.

We are arguing that a paradigm shift towards sustainable development is in the making. It is not an easy notion to operationalize though, but it includes among other things the maintenance of non-renewable resources, the preservation of biodiversity, and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Applied to the city, sustainable development has a number of key dimensions. To be called sustainable in the proper sense, a city must score well on all of them.

Work and wealth

A basic problem throughout human history has been that many of the world's urban populations lack the resources to lead decent lives. In our days, lack of access to useful employment, to adequate shelter, to good public health, to public safety, to adequate childcare still afflicts hundreds of millions of poor city people.

Economic growth, however, is not enough as an objective. We also need to consider income distribution, democratic participation, people's empowerment. Historical evidence shows that it is possible to have both growth and equity, and examples of relative success could be given. But there is a major problem: both in the developed and the developing countries, large sectors of employment are simply disappearing. Here is the real significance of that much-overused word, globalization.

Cities can and do adapt, by converting themselves into service cities like Glasgow, Birmingham, Rotterdam, Dortmund, Boston, Singapore or Hong Kong. But technology is making inroads into service employment too, and this will continue: structural unemployment and segregation are looming large.

Social cohesion and solidarity

The problem of work relates to another phenomenon: social and political exclusion which is related to income distribution, but also to illegal activities of all kinds.

There is thus a specific dimension of sustainability: a city that prospers economically but fails to distribute its wealth with some degree of equity runs the risk of disintegrating into a "civil war" between the haves and the have-nots.

Here, too, are many basic questions. How can policy makers prevent social exclusion? How can cities integrate their new immigrant communities into the mainstream political process? What is the role of education in all this?

Robust ecosystems

A further basic dimension of sustainability lies in the problem of the environmental deficit. In nearly every city there is concern with the depletion of non-renewable resources, with negative externalities arising from pollution and contamination, and the threat of irreversible damage to the ecosystems.

How to resolve this dilemma? Unsustainable forms of development may continue because of dire poverty. One message, therefore, cannot be repeated too often: Poverty is a great threat to preserving local and global ecosystems.

In highly developed cities, by contrast, the enemies seem to consist of a combination of ignorance, vested interests, sunk capital and trade-offs between private goods and public goods.

Urban mobility

Mobility is a special case of the dilemma of environmental sustainability. *The Economist* has put it this way: "The world has gone car-crazy, and the measure of a metropolis is the size of its traffic jams" (Levinson, 1998).

There has been dramatic traffic growth in a short period of time. In Mexico City, for instance, the number of vehicles has grown by 30 percent since 1991; in Seoul, traffic more than doubled between 1990 and 1996; and in Bangkok 300 new vehicles a day went on to the streets. The problem is dramatically illustrated by these developing mega-cities; but it is universal.

Unfortunately, most transport experts do not agree on the remedies to be chosen. Some argue for yet greater concentration; others assert that policy should seek to disperse jobs. So there is an urgent question: Has the process of urban diffusion any limit? Can it, should it be ended and even reversed?

In many highly developed countries, above all in congested Western Europe, citizens and politicians have awakened and have begun to look for solutions. Thus, in cities like Karlsruhe and Freiburg, they have begun to promote more compact urban forms. The difficulty, however, is that in cities where this sort of stranglehold will shortly become most acute – the mega-cities of the middle-income developing world – there is little consciousness of the need for new options.

So there is a real dilemma here: by the time the problem is recognized and action is taken, it may be too late. Some believe in the best of all worlds: unlimited mobility through zero-emission vehicles, electronically guided to their destinations. This is a vision that has been haunting futurologists for years.

Citizenry

The end of the 20th century sometimes seemed like a political miracle: democracy recaptured most of the ground it earlier lost to totalitarian or autocratic dictatorships. Two dilemmas, however, remain. The first is pressure-group politics. The second is the failure of local democracy in many cities of the world. City governments are thus often seen as impotent in the face of larger economic and social forces.

Summing up

These were some of the key dilemmas for policy makers in most cities of the world. They are experienced in London and Lima, in Stuttgart and São Paulo, in New York and Nairobi. But they express themselves most acutely in the fast-growing cities of the middle-income countries. And this is so for three main reasons:

• first, many of these cities are already bigger than their equivalents in the developed world and are projected to become even larger;.
• second, they have only recently embarked on their development process, so that the main consequences may emerge only in the next decades; and,
• third, neither their structures of local government nor their administrative traditions are developed in a way to tackle the problems adequately.

What seems to be needed now is two streams of transfer of resources and skills:

• first, from the developed to the developing world; and,
• second, from the successful cities of the developing world to the rest.

A final word: I would very much appreciate it if we could make some progress during our conference in:

• evaluating, re-evaluating the old virtues of the Regensburg type and their relevance for today;
• discussing the relevant new criteria for defining success of city development now and in the future.

As President of the World Society for Ekistics, I really would like to learn what the Ekistics concept could contribute to answering those two basic questions.

Thank you for your patience.

Notes

1. See D. Agrafiotis, "Knowledge and interdisciplinarity as socio-cultural uncertainties," first C.A. Doxiadis Lecture just prior to the WSE Symposion "Defining Success of the City in the 21st Century," Berlin, 24 October, 2001, in *Ekistics,* vol. 69, no. 412/413/414 (January-June 2002).
2. See Peter Hall and Ulrich Pfeiffer (eds.), *Urban Future 21. A Global Agenda for the Twenty-First Century Cities* (London, Alexandrine Press, 2000).