



UNSUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AN URBANIZED PLANET: THE CRISIS OF URBAN CULTURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY METROPOLIS

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1 We live in a world where the majority of the population lives in urban centres. This shows a tendency toward a generalized urbanization. In 2014, more than the 50% of the population lives in urban areas and current projections suggest that by 2050, this proportion will be between 66% and 70%. In Latin America, the urbanization rate has already reached 66% in 2014, and is anticipated to increase to 84% by 2050. In Brazil, more than 80% of the current population is urban. However, not only is urbanization increasing, but it is also transforming urban landscapes. Our world is organized around large, metropolitan areas which, themselves, are interconnected with one another. The proportion of metropolitan populations (conurbations of over 5 million inhabitants) is currently about 18% and is expected to reach 23% by 2025.

 Urbanization has had a worldwide effect on the generic improvement of populations' living conditions in terms of income, work, education, health, and welfare.

The figures below show the acceleration of the urbanization process in recent decades and their projections for the coming ones. A metropolitan region, or to use Sir Peter Hall's term a «polycentric metropolis», is not what I would define as simply a larger city. Rather, it is a new space characterized by its multiple centrality. This is the combination of land-use within a functional area of urban, rural, agricultural, industrial, and residential, or any mixture of residential and work usage in the same space. A metropolitan region is constructed around communications, telecommunications, and transport networks that allow vast urban territories to function as a whole. Increased mobility also allows cities to overcome spatial distances in everyday life. This new urban form is specific to spatial, economic, and cultural factors, which I will detail in this analysis. The metropolitan region of Mexico City is a paradigmatic example of this urban form. It includes the federal district, as well as the extensive conurbation that extends throughout Mexico. However, the largest metropolitan regions are found in Asia. This is shown in the attached documents regarding the world's 30 largest metropolitan regions.

The paradox is that these concentrations of both population and activity exist where com-

munication networks and computer-based electronic telecommunications allow for the integration of these different activities in such contiguous spaces. In fact, it is precisely this new communication infrastructure that allows for concentrated activities and establishments to maintain functional, intra- and inter-metropolitan relationships through connection networks. This concentrated activity generates economies of agglomeration and synergy which makes metropolitan regions more productive, creative, and dynamic in their history. As Sir Peter Hall highlights in his brilliant work, "Cities and Civilization", this is linked to the tradition that large cities are centres of civilization.



Metropolitan regions are cradles of creativity, and channels of innovation and cultural expression.

2 Metropolitan regions concentrate the wealth and power of a country, and together, the whole world. Additionally they are cradles of creativity, and channels of innovation and cultural expression. Their influence extends throughout surrounding regions, thus urbanizing rural areas, as well as the entire country, through the very activity and innovation on which these other territories depend. These urban areas are not exempt from crises or conflicts, and yet they constitute the dynamic force of economic growth. Relatively speaking, they provide greater opportunities, and access to better services, for most of the population according to indicators of employment, education, healthcare, and infrastructure. It is for these reasons that people continue to migrate to large cities in spite of the enormous problems for survival they face there. One key factor is improving the status of children in metropolitan areas to drive continuous rural-urban and urban-metropolitan migration.

3 At the same time that large cities are driving forces of economic growth and innovation, in all areas of human activity, they are also environments where we see increasing social inequality, polarization, poverty, and misery. Additionally, the social and ecological problems of urbanization are more accentuated for immigrants, ethnic minorities, women, children, and the disabled.

4 Metropolitan regions present increasing issues as regards unemployment, the informal sector, urban informality, and extreme poverty. Even so, these problems are less serious than those faced in rural areas or regions marginalized by the current global growth model. Moreover, from the data we can generally say that in large cities around the world, healthcare services, education, and urban social services have improved as a whole. Having said that, some of the quantitative improvements in healthcare and education occur within existing ineffective and discriminatory models for education and healthcare. The economic crisis has put pressure on Europe and North America to dismantle the welfare state. Nevertheless, urbanization has had a worldwide effect on the generic improvement of populations' living conditions in terms of income, work, education, health, and welfare. In order to analyze the relationship between urbanization and people's living conditions, I have calculated a series of statistical regressions from a worldwide database with data gathered by various agencies of the United Nations. In calculating the statistical relationship between urban and metropolitan growth, with quality of life indicator variables, there was a positive relationship with life-expectancy, decreases in infant mortality, improvements in water and sewage infrastructure, as well as access to education and healthcare.



That is to say, there are positive effects of urbanization on some of the basic elements of people's lives. These occur in spite of the increased social problems in large cities. Traditionally speaking, this positively impacts human development.

- 5 There are, however, new forms of deteriorating qualities of life, which I would label as inhumane development and ecologically unsustainable, such as:
- Ecological destruction. Using certain indicators, urbanization strongly correlates with air pollution and pollution-related deaths.
 - There is an increasing deterioration in quality of daily life related to housing and transportation. For example, in 2005 the percentages of populations living in informal, or individually constructed housing, were: 26% in Argentina, 50% in Bolivia, 29% in Brazil, 18% in Colombia, 32% in Venezuela, 36% in Peru, 41% in the Philippines, 47% in Pakistan, 66% in Nigeria, 70% in Bangladesh, and 33% in China.
 - There is an increase in urban poverty and equality, correlating with growth, in large metropolises.
 - Worse still are the disintegration of social fabrics and the destruction of urban cultures of coexistence. There is an increasingly obvious destruction of residential communities and their shared cultures and with it an accelerated transition toward individualism, and a sense of primal competition between people, as a way of life. Using the sociological surveys available, we observed that urbanization is also correlated with distrust of one's neighbours, and of society in general. It is also correlated with the expectation that others will generally treat you unfairly.
 - There is an increasing predominance of the culture of consumption, above all, among

young people who are frustrated with their inability to consume what they feel is expected of them.

- There has been a general destruction of public, and consequently, relative space.
- The size of a metropolis demands greater mobility. Insufficient and poor infrastructure planning are conditions that result in substantial increases in transit time, which are detrimental to people's quality of life.
- From an architectural and spatial point of view, we anonymously aid in the limitless growth of metropolises, without spatial differentiation, and without symbolic identification among inhabitants and habitat.
- Consequently, the substantial economic growth taking place throughout most parts of the world contributes to alleviating certain social problems in employment, income, health care, and education. However, this leads to a process of urbanization where new problems facing quality of life standards arise, whose social and ecological conditions can make metropolises unsustainable.



An accelerated transition toward individualism, and a sense of primal competition between people, as a way of life.

- 6 Polls show that the main problems in everyday life in large cities are violence and fear.
- In comparison with other spaces and time periods, the data show a growth in assaults tied to competitive individualism, social inequality, and spatial segregation. Using various criteria, we observed a correlation between metropolitan growth and assault, violent death, and homicide rates. The level of violence is due in part to local and global criminal economies, whose main consumption and central organizations exist in large cities.
- The perception of violence is even more accentuated by its reality. Metropolitan growth correlates with people's general feelings of distrust and fear.
 - The cultural root of this perceived violence is in a dominant neoliberal ideology of competitiveness for success by any means.
 - The problem is worsened by a fall in, or absence of, social protection networks in many countries.
 - Also, young people without prospects and little education are prevented from entering into the job market, and are more prone to violence and crime.
 - Preventative and protective corrective action policies do not work in many metropolises because of extensive institutional corruption, particularly in regard to policing.
 - Prisons become schools of crime, controlled by leaders of various criminal organizations and corrupt guards.
 - Housing crises frequently entail people's expulsion from their homes to live in the streets, in uncontrolled areas, or in ones controlled by local criminal groups.
 - Large metropolises also create deteriorations in collective mental health like feelings of alienation, hopelessness, mass depression, primarily among women, and even suicidal thoughts. Even mental health care institutions are forms of isolation rather than of treatment.
 - Old age, too, marginalizes people instead of sheltering them or turning the elderly into valuable sources of life-experience.

7 Institutions function poorly because they are disconnected from real problems. This is the result of political classes being more concerned with their political careers rather than everyday issues. Worldwide political opinion data show the existence of a general legitimization crisis of political institutions, more on a national than a local level. However, it seems that there are no institutions that are exempt from this. Rather, there has been a collapse of citizens' confidence in institutions, as they are left unprotected.

Nevertheless, where there are local governments that innovate and protect citizens in varying conditions, people's hopes are heightened by their very need for support. Some examples of this, from data collected over the last two decades, are Medellín, Mexico City, Porto Alegre and Rio Grande do Sul, Curitiba, Portland, and Barcelona.



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8 The culture of mass media amplifies personal and moral crises by marketing sensationalism and fear. On the other hand, the culture of mass self-communication, the Internet, and mobile phones act as partial compensation for this isolation and incapacity to express the will of the people. This is perhaps because they contribute to the construction of personal autonomy, cultural, political and construction of horizontal networks of solidarity. Global data from the British Computer Institute indicate a positive relationship between Internet use and feelings of empowerment and sociability. At the same time, the culture of the Internet separates us from urban, social environments and contributes to social fragmentation on an individual level, except in cases of collective socio-political mobilization.



Local governments become the decisive sphere for discussing ideas and policies that will determine our collective potential to live and survive.

9 Reactions to metropolitan social disintegration take place at several levels.

- a) At the collective level there is an emergence of communitarian identities, and the establishing of protective communities, which may also entail risks of fundamentalism and sectarianism.
- b) At the socio-political level there are new social movements and social movement networks that are usually outside of traditional parties and organizations.

What happens then? People do not live simply to protest.

10 Family plays an essential role in people's lives. It is the main source of social support and a place of refuge from the challenges of daily life. However, the concept of the «traditional» family has been dismantled through challenging patriarchal family norms. While other egalitarian familial forms have not yet appeared, younger generations and women are constructing alternatives.

11 Historically, religion has played an essential role as a place of consolation, refuge, and protection . In fact there has been parallel growth between worldwide religiousness and urbanization: 89% of the world's population are believers (compared to

83% in 1980). Although, while major religious institutions like the Catholic Church are facing a crisis of legitimacy, Pentecostalism grows around the world. Particularly in Latin America, this is contributing to the separation of what is religious and what is institutional, or introduces new cultural forms into regional and local institutions.

12 In short, individualization and social disruption in large cities are accompanied by a growing delegitimization of social and political institutions. Urban society is thus fragmented into micro-communities and individualities at the same time that mass media constructs dissonant images of people's experiences.



Citizens are now taking initiative in imagining and developing their own cities. They are fighting for a new, horizontal, and inclusive culture of coexistence.

CONCLUSION

Despite the financial crisis in the United States and Europe, throughout most of the world in the last decade, we have seen economic growth, enlarged average levels of income, and improved access to health care, education, and social services. These have been prompted by globalization processes, accentuated by metropolitan regions, of market dynamics and technological revolutions. At the same, this has provoked a rise in environmental deterioration, threatening the ecological sustainability of regions, and the planet, including a growing threat of pandemics. Additionally, certain metropolitan cultures increase competitiveness, lack of solidarity, violence, and fear, at a time when traditional institutions like state, family, and religion are suffering from a crisis of legitimacy and efficiency in their management of urban and social problems.

In such conditions, citizens are now taking initiative in imagining and developing their own cities. They are fighting for a new, horizontal, and inclusive culture of coexistence. However, urban social movements alone cannot control global processes. They need institutional articulation that can only be achieved through relationships with local governments. In this way, on a global level, local governments become the decisive sphere for discussing ideas and policies that will determine our collective potential to live and survive.



INTERNATIONAL AWARD "UCLG - MEXICO CITY - CULTURE 21"

The objective of the "International Award UCLG - MEXICO City - Culture 21" is to recognise leading cities and people that have distinguished themselves through their contribution to culture as a dimension of sustainable development. On the 31st of May 2014, the jury composed by Ing. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, Gonzalo Carámbula, Dr Danielle Cliche, Catherine Cullen, and Dr Alicia Ziccardi held its last meeting for deliberating on the designation of a city among the 56 candidates and a winning personality. The Jury decided that the "Individual Award" be shared ex-aequo by Manuel Castells and Farida Shaheed. The Award ceremony took place in Mexico City (Mexico) on 12th November 2014.

WWW.AWARD.AGENDA21CULTURE.NET