

## **BIOS AND URBAN PLANNING - DIMENSIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

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### **URBANIZATION**

The world population encountered an urbanization of unprecedented pace during the second half of the 20th century, which brought with it numerous problems of housing, infrastructure, transportation, land speculation, squatting and environment. Major public services in most of the cities of the Third World are not being supplied in adequate standards for billions of people.

The number of metropolises with over a million inhabitants has tripled during the last 35 years. In 1950, only 78 cities exceeded that size. The number has become 258 in 1985, and it is estimated that there will be 511 cities of this size in the year 2010 and 639 in the year 2025.

The number of cities with a population of a million will be increasing from 110 to 153 in advanced countries, and from 146 to 486 in the less developed countries between 1985 and 2025. It is remarkable to see that while most giant metropolises in advanced countries experienced an aggregate decline of population in their core areas since 1960, in developing countries the population of city core and suburbs have both increased tremendously.

### **URBAN PATHOLOGY**

Ataxia is a term borrowed from biology which designates the pathological non-coordination of body movements. According to some biologists, "pathologies occur if growth is faster than the growth of the boundaries of the niche. The niche is a container and a container has some upper limit. The concept of growth is necessarily tied up to some notion of equilibrium with maximum and minimum flows, and by implication, some idea of "optimum" based on such principles as the largest size with the least damage to the holding power to the niche."

Very rapid growth of a city in a relatively poor country is usually characterized by such non-coordination activities in various sectors. Urban pathology can take the form of traffic congestion, air and water pollution, overcrowding, and so on, compensated by certain advantages like existence of more opportunities for employment, health, education, cultural attractions or leisure activities.

There is no doubt that urban pathology is not primarily related to city size alone, but to the degree of harmony between its various parts. It can be relatively small but seriously pathological. It might also be a giant city, but apparently in relatively good equilibrium.

It is not only the developing world that seems to suffer from the absence or inadequacy of planned approaches in urban development. The developed world is no exception. In a gold-prize-winning essay, recently submitted to a contest organized by the daily Japanese newspaper, Asahi, the authors seriously recommended putting the capital city (Tokyo) in several "giant ships", one ship carrying the legislative and administrative branches of the state apparatus, to spend two years in each of Japan's major harbors, in accordance with a 21st century rotating capital concept.

They recommended that the increasing need for the internationalization of Tokyo must be met by the establishment of an economic ward (keizai-ku) and a world ward (sekai-ku), forming the territorial structure of the metropolitan government, in addition to the existing 23 wards (ku). Apart from such science-fiction-like products of creative human imagination, it is known that plans are in preparation for at least part of the rapidly increasing population and service functions of the capital city to be settled on and under the Tokyo Bay at the beginning of the 21st century.

It was a matter of "pull" rather than "push" factors that brought the agricultural population down to less than 10% in Japan. The tendency for population and economic activities to concentrate in the Tokyo Region, including Nagoya and Osaka metropolitan areas, has considerably accelerated during the last three decades and continues to rise. The percentage of population of these three regions plus Kobe, within the total population of Japan increased from 35.1% in 1950 to 57% in 1985, creating a megalopolis similar to the one extending from Massachusetts down to Delaware along the East coast of the United States, as observed by geographer Jean Gottman. Nearly 60% of manufacturing is concentrated in three metropolitan areas. The concentration rates for bank loans, wholesale transactions and large firm headquarters vary between 75 and 82%.

The highly developed and efficient mass transportation network has made it possible for an increasing population to reside in satellite

communities in the Tokyo Region and commute to the center. Both concentration and deconcentration seem to exert an impressive impact upon the quality of urban living within the Tokyo metropolitan region, most of the time adversely. The law of contemporary capitalist development which requires further spatial concentration, tends to shift at the same time, increasing external dis-economies to urban residents as a social cost.

One important element of this cost is certainly the incredible pace of increase and level of land prices, which decrease considerably the chances for the effective implementation of urban development plans and aggravates the housing conditions of low and middle-income classes. According to some estimates, due to speculatively inflated land prices, it would have cost more to buy the territory of Tokyo and Kanagawa prefectures than the whole United States. It is also remarkable that the National Land Agency recently announced that a square meter of land in Ginza, central Tokyo, was over US\$200,000, and this was considered a conservative figure. The urban land crisis in Japan began to involve diplomatic missions in Tokyo, including the Greeks, who expressed their intention to close its offices in order to overcome the financial difficulty caused by increasing rents and speculative land prices.

Although some still believe that Tokyo does not really face a serious problem, and that overcrowding and rampant speculation are merely signs of the city's success, it is certain that at the heart of the issue lies in excessive concentration of population, non-primary economic activities and the relative inefficiencies of urban planning and urban land policies. The development of Tokyo Region at the expense of the rest of the country is one of the major determining factors.

## DECENTRALIZATION

The Takeshita Government rightly declared that decentralization must be the ultimate decision. But how? With what means? Certain steps have been taken to decongest the nation's capital through the transfer of upper level administrative offices, research institutions, and the like. There are also several proposed schemes to transfer the capital itself to an alternative location.

However, the core of the problem is essentially an economic one and it naturally needs economic solutions. It is the large companies that are responsible for the tremendous land price increases. Many banks preferred to channel funds generously to these companies which anticipated enormous profits from the speculation game, to be realized as a result of a new office building boom. Therefore, it seems that unless the government is determined to intervene actively in the land market, which naturally might displease the private companies, the current proposals for decentralization will remain unactioned. Political rationality, or realism of the action to be taken in this matter is of course important.

One of the biggest difficulties facing Japan is embedded in the commitment of the government to resolve the problem within the rationale of the market forces without questioning its practicability. Although such an approach is largely dictated by the need for consistency between ideology and practice, it must be admitted that the inherent conflict between the public and the private interests cannot be kept under control without the determined intervention of the state as an arbiter to correct imperfections of the market mechanism, through such measures as a radical tax reform and large scale expropriation, or public purchase of urban land. The view held recently by a governmental committee that land is a limited national asset and must be used to raise the people's standards of living or to improve the general welfare, seems highly relevant. The realities of the present and the approaching century, as distinct from the previous one, oblige mankind to behave with a sense of social responsibility towards future generations.

A suitable decentralization for Japan seems to be the most promising solution in the 21st century. Decentralization of only political and administrative functions of the capital is not enough. What is most needed is to decentralize economic concentration. Achievements in regional development during the last three decades are highly promising in this respect. In a country of relatively small size, with extraordinarily efficient transportation and communications systems, decentralization would still make it possible to reap the benefits of external economies. Tokyo may perpetuate its primacy as the indisputable symbol of economic internationalization. In other words, the preservation of vital functions of the primate city and the setting up of a new state capital are not mutually exclusive goals. And, of course, social considerations are neither less important than purely economic ones, nor unaffordable in this developed economy of the world.

One can give numerous examples of socio-economic characteristics from the developing world that make a strategy of decentralization a mandate for orderly urban growth, balanced regional development and optimal use of resources including the environmental values. One can single out certain selected issues which may be regarded as relevant for both developing and advanced nations.

According to a recent report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, the world will enter the 21st century with much worse environmental and living conditions than compared with the present, particularly in cities of Third World countries.

The major reason is that each community and each country strives for survival and prosperity with insufficient regard to the impact of their production and consumption behavior upon others. Another important factor behind the failure is inadequate urban strategies aimed at keeping state intervention in the process of urbanization down to a minimum level. The post-war discovery of the planning tool is presently becoming a highly distrusted means in most of the market-oriented western societies. They not only advocate development through pure and complete

liberalization and privatization, but also make serious efforts to subject the developing world to the same guiding principles without realizing that the problems, needs and potentials of Third World countries require development strategies considerably different from those followed by those of the industrialized urban world.

## PLANNING URBAN GROWTH

Planning urban growth, management of cities, land-use and environment, are typical contemporary issues which tend to dictate the acceptance of a planned approach, which is diametrically opposed to the laissez-faire, laissez-passer philosophy much advocated by the liberal-minded statesmen and administrators in advanced countries of today.

The idea of interventionism and planning emerged as counter-measures to the negative externalities created by the free market forces following the industrial revolution. At present, as we face the turn of the 20th century, characterized by worldwide degradation of environment, haphazard growth of cities, land speculation, numerous forms of urban poverty facing billions of people living in the Third World, it is somewhat paradoxical that developing countries are advised to place increasing emphasis on private, rather than public interests in the preparation and implementation of their urban development policies. Yet experience shows that public and private interests rarely coincide in practice.

If more than 50% of urban residents live in the illegally formed settlements in developing countries under miserable conditions at the beginning of the 21st century, we must seriously reconsider our approach to the problems associated with the process of urbanization. It is clear that an unlimited liberalization policy without due regard to moral responsibilities of individuals towards the future of society would have much more disastrous, costly and unfavourable consequences for developing nations than for developed ones insofar as urban living conditions are concerned.

We must remember that the city planning process is not simply a technical occupation and impartial. Values play an important role in all stages of the planning process. The amount and quality of information is, of course, a significant factor in defining the goals and objectives to be achieved. However, ethical considerations must ultimately dictate who will be served by the plans and how the future of settlements will be affected by them. One important example is the attitude towards ownership of urban land. Land ownership may be viewed as an essentially economic phenomenon by economists, but one can easily argue that the question of land ownership has become a moral issue in our century. Progress of the concept of public interest in the 20th century has put an end to the right of land ownership as an absolute right. Therefore, the most successful urban planning is achieved in countries where the use of urban land is not left to unrestricted selfishness of private interests.

Such an observation brings us to a final consideration of a more theoretical issue which is the role to be played by the institution of rationality in modern societies. Inspired by the writings of Max Weber, many social scientists and planners tended to distinguish between the value rationality and instrumental rationality. In other words, they suggested that since it is extremely difficult in pluralist societies to build upon a unique, high level value towards which the plans could be directed, efforts have to be concentrated on the means to achieve the given ends, instead of goals and values. The planning literature of today is increasingly becoming full of arguments in favor of the concept of instrumental - or functional rationality rather than the substantial - value rationality. It seems to me that, particularly in the less pluralist Third World countries, it is much easier to identify goals for agreement than in advanced nations, and it is appropriate to advocate a kind of value rational planning style despite all its difficulties. I believe here lies the greatest promise of urban planning for the future of bios.

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