

Gazette, Issue 8 (2011)

FCL - Future Cities Laboratory

Journal Issue**Author(s):**

Läpple, Dieter; Cairns, Stephen

Publication date:

2011-09-14

Permanent link:

<https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000120350>

Rights / license:

In Copyright - Non-Commercial Use Permitted

Originally published in:

Gazette

Perspectives of Resilient Cities

HAMBURG – We are witnessing a transition to a predominantly urban world spanning the globe with cities and new urban configurations, providing opportunities of economic growth, wealth creation, technological and cultural innovation and social inclusion. However, the dominant urbanisation patterns expanding all over the world are still highly fossil-fuel dependent with high impact on global warming and climate change. And the rapid urbanisation is linked with the urbanisation of poverty, growing slums, and environmental degradation.

It is obvious: cities are where the destiny will be played out.

Cities are not just part of the most challenging problems; they also provide potentials and opportunities to develop and implement solutions.

But cities are not guaranteed to survive. They have to learn and have to be designed to survive and to regenerate in a rapidly changing and increasingly instable world. They are or will be confronted with frequent climate change events like storms, floods or droughts; with earthquakes or terrorist attacks; with the impacts of an unstable and fast changing world economy and turbulences on the financial markets; with deep demographic changes and social disturbances.

Furthermore, in many cities, especially of the developing world, food security will become a severe concern.

Faced with this challenges cities have to contribute to avoid the un-manageable (mitigation), and have to be prepared to manage the un-avoidable of an increasingly unstable world (adaptation). However, resilience for cities means much more than climate change mitigation and adaptation. Resilient cities have to develop robust, adaptive, inclusive and innovative structures to be prepared for an unexpected not foreseeable future and to find answers to equity and sustainability.

DIETER LÄPPLE



Dieter Läßle

Biography. Dieter Läßle is Professor Emeritus of International Urban Studies at the HafenCity University Hamburg. For many years he directed the Institute for Urban Economics at the University of Technology Hamburg. He is also an advisor and contributor to the Urban Age Programme of the London School of Economics and a member of the board of trustees of the International Building Exposition – IBA Hamburg. In 2007, he received the Award for Urban Culture of the Architectural Association (BDA Hamburg Baukulturpreis).

Academic Qualifications. MEng, MS in Economics and PhD in Social and Economic Sciences.

Publications/Exhibitions/Awards.

Dieter Läßle, Markus Messling and Jürgen Trabant (eds). *Stadt und Urbanität – The new metropolis*. Kadmos Verlag: Berlin (2011).

Dieter Läßle, 'The German System', in *The Endless City*, R. Burdett and D. Sudjic (eds). Phaidon Press: New York (2007), 232–43.

Dieter Läßle, Xiangming Chen, Yuan Ren (eds). *The Era of Global City-Regions*. Fudan University Press, Shanghai (2009).

The Urban Age & the Diversity of Urbanisation Patterns in a Global World

Edited extract from Dieter Läßle's 'Diversity of Urbanisation Patterns in a Global World' (in T. Rienits, J. Sigler, K. Christiaan (eds.): *Open City: Designing Coexistence*. Amsterdam 2009, 51–63). for Making Future Cities conference, Singapore.

HAMBURG – We are living in an era of great transition. In 1900, only 15 percent of the global population lived in cities. Since then however, our planet has transformed from a more or less closed world of farms, villages, and small towns into an open urban civilisation with ever larger megacities, from the predominance of local self-sufficient living conditions to an interconnected globalised world.

However, this triumph of the city over the countryside is connected with an evident paradox. While a process of urbanisation that spans the globe is leading to the disappearance of the rural, the concept of the city seems to be dissolving. Through the dynamic and the specific settlement formations of the urbanisation process, and particularly through the centrifugal and decentralising tendencies that have influenced the changes in cities and metropolitan regions in developed nations since the First World War, we are faced with the fundamental question: In an urbanised world will there still be the phenomenon of 'the city', or will we in the future be confronted just by different, functionally specialised and increasingly socially homogenised urban configurations?

The Global Urbanisation Process Shows Very Diverse Patterns

At least at first sight, the urbanisation process spanning the globe seems to show a distinct polarisation: in the Southern Hemisphere, cities are growing faster than ever before. 'In the last two decades, the urban population of the developing

world has grown by an average of three million people per week'. [1] Whilst in the developed world the total urban population is expected to remain largely unchanged in the next two decades.

The world is urbanising at a fast pace, partly due to rural decline. The expulsion of the population from agriculture in Third World countries results in people attempting to flee from poverty and hardship in the countryside. In hope of work and living space, people migrate to cities, where most of them have to struggle for their daily survival in unplanned spontaneous settlements, shanty towns, favelas, or bidonvilles.

The urbanisation of the Third World is thus above all characterised by the centripetal dynamic of rural flight. The result is diffuse settlement formations with multiple centers, urbanised interurban zones, gated communities, waste lands, and labyrinthine slums, the so-called shadow cities. The growth of these cities occurs predominantly as a growth of their slums. Today, a billion people already live in slums. For 2030, the number has been projected at two billion.

In developing and newly industrialised countries, in addition to a form of urbanisation primarily driven by rural poverty, there are also evident urbanisation processes that are driven by highly dynamic processes of industrialisation. Most notably, this is the case for the high-speed urbanism of China. 'The world's most populous country is engaged in an urbanisation process involving more people than at any time in history, closely linked to the country's record-breaking economic growth'. [2] In China, the urban population increased in the last 30 years from 170 million to 530 million, almost entirely through rural-urban migration. The metropolitan regions of Shanghai and Shenzhen are primary examples. Thirty years ago, 30,000 people lived in the coastal town of Shenzhen on the border of Hong Kong. Today, more than 8.3 million people live there.

By contrast, in the cities of the northern hemisphere, we have seen more than 50 years not of rural flight but of urban flight. As a consequence of the roaring development of productive forces, increasing standard of living, and mass motorisation, the centripetal dynamic of industrial urbanisation has been increasingly countered by the centrifugal tendencies of suburbanisation.

The conflicting dynamics of the global process of urbanisation could be reduced to this simple formula: in the South, poverty is the essential driving force of urbanisation; in the North, wealth is leading to dissolution of the city.

Making Future Cities

Future Cities Laboratory
First International Conference
12–14 September, Singapore

14 September

Keynote Lecture: Perspectives of Resilient Cities

Dieter Läßle

SINGAPORE – Contemporary debate on urbanisation is strongly coloured by a hierarchical logic in which those cities that are regarded as 'global' – paradigmatically, New York, London and Tokyo – are seen to orchestrate and set the economic, social and cultural terms of reference for other cities further down in the hierarchy. Dieter Läßle's analysis on processes of metropolitanisation in Germany (an excerpt of which is reproduced in this issue of *Gazette*), shows that 'instead of the emergence of a dominant global city at the top of a hierarchy in Germany we are confronted with a network of complementary metropolitan regions that forms an interlinked nexus for the spatially distributed metropolitan functions'. He argues that 'The absence of a German city high up in the hierarchy of global cities must not necessarily be seen as a deficit. The decentralised spatial structure offers – compared with the concentric global cities – much better preconditions for the spatial-temporal integration of the work-living relations'. This tiny sample of Läßle's scholarship is a powerful demonstration that regionally- and nationally-framed research on cities remains essential in the wider project of understanding the differentiations and diversifications within global urban processes.

STEPHEN CAIRNS

FCL – Future Cities Laboratory

GAZETTE

Issue	Tags
08	Resilience, Economy, Metropolis, Climate Change, Polycentrality, Urban Magnet
Date	Editorial Team
14/09/2011	Executive Editor: Franz Oswald Editor: Stephen Cairns Copy-Editor: Kevin Lim
Fold, Punch, File	Published by
	FCL – Future Cities Laboratory Singapore ETH Centre for Global Environmental Sustainability (SEC) c/o National University of Singapore (NUS), 117566 Singapore gazette@fcl.arch.eth.ch
	 Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich
	

Resurgence of the Cities of the North

One of the most striking features of the last decade is the resurgent of cities in the Northern hemisphere. After 50 years of migration from the city in the form of suburbanisation and partly also in the form of disurbanisation we are confronted with an impressing ‘urban turnaround’. Obviously globalisation and digitalisation do not result in a decline or disintegration of cities, as predicted by many experts, but rather to a re-evaluation of the city and new urban dynamics.

This resurgence of cities has many causes. Looking at New York, which in the 1970s was a shrinking city, besides the impacts of globalisation and digitisation, immigration is at the heart of this so-called urban turnaround. Following to Fishman, the real force behind the reurbanisation trend is ‘the global migration of immigrants from around the world as well as longer-term residents who are discovering the possibilities of inner cities’. [3] Immigration is strongly shaping the future of this comeback city and is changing the face of its neighborhoods. An important precondition for this stimulating force of immigration is however a renewed vitality of the urban economy, mainly the recreation of a genuinely urban economy of flexible, small-scale, highly skilled units whose jobs are replacing the lost world of urban mass production. And this knowledge and culture based economy is linked with the expansion of a low skilled service economy, which has enabled immigrant households with several wage earners to compensate for the relatively low wages of each working member.

Besides immigration the main driving force of the resurgence of the cities in the developed world is the shift from an industrial-based to a knowledge- and culture-based urban economy. However, the new urban dynamics are submitted to a double selectivity. The cities that mainly profit from this new urban dynamic are those that, as a result of their history, possess good conditions for a knowledge based service economy – that

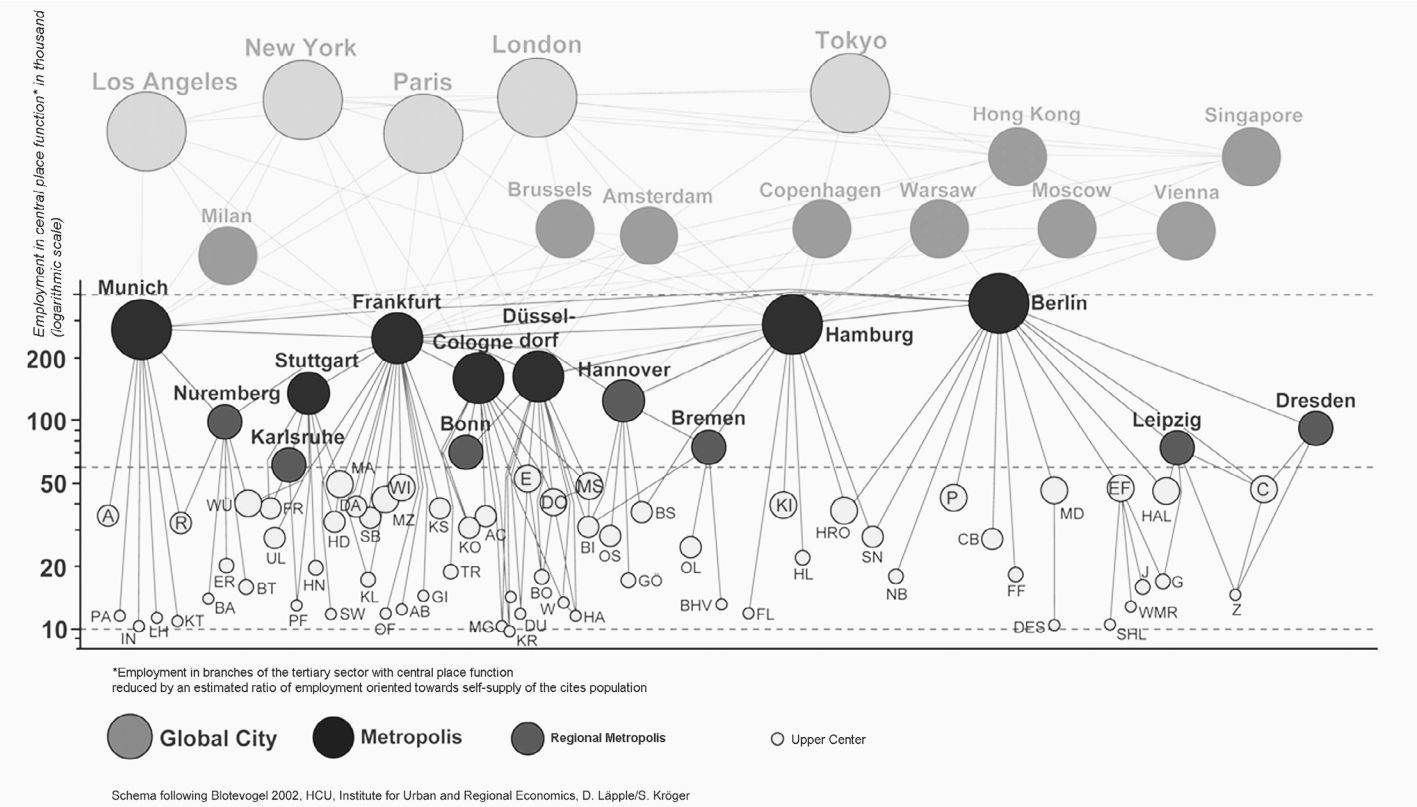


Fig 1. The German Metropolitan System: Integrated into Global, European, National and Regional Networks (multi-tiered network), from Hans H. Blotevogel, ‘Städtesystem und Metropolregionen’, in *Nationalatlas Bundesrepublik Deutschland – Dörfer und Städte*, ed., Institut für Länderkunde Leipzig (München: Elsevier, 2002), 40-43.

is those cities with a developed skill base. This form of selectivity is summarised by the urban economist Ed Glaeser: ‘The key to urban success or failure in today’s economy is simple: high-skill cities prosper; low-skill ones stagnate or decline’. [4]

There is, however, a further selectivity, which can be characterised by the process of metropolisation. Metropolisation is used here as a paraphrase for the increasing concentration of development potentials and innovation capacities in metropolitan regions and major city regions. Obviously, besides the skill level of the urban workforce, the actual size of cities matters. It is mainly the metropolises, with their large labor markets, especially the highly qualified, that benefit from the new urban dynamics.

The Urban Labour Market – as ‘Urban Magnet’

With the transition to a knowledge economy, intellectual labor and human creativity are becoming the key production factors; as a consequence, urban labor markets increasingly function as urban magnets that attract both firms and qualified professionals. The larger and more diverse the labor market, the easier it is for workers to find the right job for the right career, and the easier it is for entrepreneurs to find the right workers for a production of complex and rapidly changing products or services. Cities are especially efficient in accelerating the search process in an economy faced by a deep restructuring where jobs are being destroyed and rapidly replaced by new jobs.

In this sense, the city functions as a hub labour market, which has to fulfill two conditions: To companies, it should provide a sufficient concentrated, specialised and diverse labour pool for knowledge and cultural production, which is dominated by volatile markets, rapidly changing products and a strong demand for highly skilled workforce. And to employees, it should on the other hand offer a very broad variety of job opportunities for professional careers – as much as possible from a single residential location – under conditions of ever-changing employment, the need of permanent further qualification.

Firms increasingly look at the availability of qualified workforce in their location choices and qualified professionals look for places with a high variety of employment possibilities and urban living conditions; often this is further shaped by double-income households with both partners striving for equal professional career. The function of metropolitan regions as labour-market hubs triggers cumulative dynamics between labour supply and labour demand, where dense labour markets become a framework for common learning and the creation of specialised pools of knowledge and skills. So skill level and size of cities form a positive feedback, which is a driving force for the rise of a new form of urban centrality.

Hierarchy versus Polycentrality

The best-known appearance of the new urban centrality is the Global City. As Saskia Sassen has convincingly depicted in many publications, the new type of global city takes on a strategic role in the globalised economy: the control, integration, and management functions of global value chains are concentrated in the global cities. At the same time, global cities are central production sites and transnational market places for high-quality, knowledge-based services.

Saskia Sassen, in particular, stresses that centralised control and management

functions have become so complex that companies are increasingly outsourcing them. They buy these key services from highly specialised providers, from business consultants, law firms, financial services companies, advertising and marketing firms, etc. It is primarily these firms specialising in high-quality knowledge production, serving a global market, that determine the new logic for agglomeration. The uneven distribution of the highly specialised and globalised functions of knowledge production is the basis for the development of an international city hierarchy. The hierarchy is headed by the global cities, where worldwide command and control centers are located and whose ‘metropolitan nodes’ offer the greatest efficiency and reach. At the bottom end of the hierarchy are implementation cities, the locales of externally controlled production and services, and the ‘black holes of marginality’ excluded from the logic of globalisation.

However, in one of her last publications Saskia Sassen points out, that there is not one ‘perfect’ global city on the top of a clear hierarchy: ‘Global firms and markets, but also cultural enterprise, want many global cities because each of these cities expands the global platform for operations, and because each is a bridge between the global and the particularities of national economies and societies’. [5] In the growing number of global cities and in their difference Saskia Sassen sees the larger story of a shift to a multi-polar world.

While in quite some countries one dominant global city has emerged, Germany – as quite some other countries – has no veritable global city. Instead it has a multi-polar urban system that forms the historical basis for the development and profiling of metropolitan functions. One could say that in Germany the new urban centrality takes the form of a polycentric process of metropolisation (Fig. 1). Instead of the emergence of a dominant global city at the top of a hierarchy in Germany we are confronted with a network of complementary metropolitan regions that forms an interlinked nexus for the spatially distributed metropolitan functions. [6] As a result of this development, metropolitan regions such as Munich, Frankfurt (Rhine-Main), Hamburg, Cologne / Düsseldorf (Rhine), as well as Stuttgart have benefited most from the new urban dynamic. Given the strong orientation of the German economy towards the global economy and the significantly advanced European economic integration, it is obvious that the German urban system is highly open and connected to both the European and global networks of cities. The German metropolitan regions with their globalised firms, interlinked to global networks, their particular research and education institutions, and their transport and communication infrastructures, function as

bridges between the national economy and the global economy, but also as entry point from the global to the national economy.

The absence of a German city high up in the hierarchy of global cities must not necessarily be seen as a deficit. The decentralised spatial structure offers – compared with the concentric global cities – much better preconditions for the spatial-temporal integration of the work-living relations, the daily mobility as well as for sustainable strategies of wastewater collection and disposal within the metropolitan regions. In view to the economic performance it keeps open if the German urban system can really exploit all scale and specialisation effects or a global economy. But it seems probable that the multiple levels of integration of the German metropolitan system results in a high capacity for innovation and, above all, in a great flexibility and adaptability. We can also expect that this polycentric system is much more resistant to external shocks which are linked with a globalised world. Therefore, the German metropolitan system could prove to be a valid alternative to the highly centralised model of the global city of the future.

DIETER LÄPPLE

Footnotes

1. UN-HABITAT, ‘State of the World’s Cities 2008/2009. Harmonious Cities’ (London: Earthscan, 2008), 15.
2. Herbert Girardet, ‘Creating Sustainable and Livable Cities’, in *Surviving the Century. Facing Climate Change Chaos & Other Global challenges*, ed., Herbert Girardet (2007), 112.
3. Robert Fishman, ‘The Fifth Migration’, *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71 (4) (2005), 359.
4. Edward L. Glaeser, ‘Why Economists Still Like Cities’, *City Journal* 6 (2) (1996), 73.
5. Saskia Sassen, ‘The Specialised Differences of Global Cities’, in *South American Cities: Securing an Urban Future*, Urban Age South American Conference Paper, Sao Paulo, December 2008), 8.
6. See Dieter Läßle, ‘The German System’, in *The Endless City*, eds., Ricky Burdett, Dudjic, Deyan (New York: Phaidon Press, 2007), 232-244.

Epilogue

There is no such entity as ‘the global economy’ in the sense of a seamless economy with clear hierarchies. The reality consists of a vast number of highly particular global circuits: some are specialised and some are worldwide while others are regional. Different circuits contain different groups of countries and cities. For instance, Mumbai is today part of a global circuit for real estate development that includes firms from cities as diverse as London and Bogotá. Global commodity trading in coffee includes New York and São Paulo as major hubs. Buenos Aires is on a global commodity trading circuit that includes Chicago and Mumbai. Globally traded commodities – gold, butter, coffee, oil, sunflower seeds – are redistributed to a vast number of destinations, no matter how few the points of origin are in some cases. Saskia Sassen, ‘The Specialised Differences of Global Cities’ (2008).