A Task Ahead[1]

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In the 1970s, the famous Greek urbanist C.A. Doxiadis, who published the journal Ekistics, was trying to map the future of the city and urbanization. In his publications, he projected a world city, which was called ecumenopolis.[2] This city had the form of a grid pattern connecting existing urban centers and leaving apart the areas that were considered uninhabitable because of high altitude, lack of water, extreme climatic conditions, and other factors preventing dense and permanent settlement. This world city was for many people a terrible image. They felt horrified by the thought of a completely integrated settlement structure covering the earth's crust with tentacles on all continents. Yet now, half a century later, we know better. In the present year 2000 it is estimated that about 50% of the world population is living in cities, and that this percentage is increasing constantly. Not only in Western countries which may be considered almost totally urbanized as even the farmers are completely mechanized, industrialized and market driven, but increasingly in Latin America and particularly in Asia and Africa, where the levels of urbanization are substantially lower. In these areas, however, the biggest cities of the world are located, such as Mexico-city and Tokyo. Their present-day sizes completely ridicule earlier scientific discussions on the optimum size of cities and I am convinced that, notwithstanding the great difficulties we envisage to create a sustainable ecumenopolis that honors human needs and at the same time respects environmental capacity, this ecumenopolis is positive in principle. The city is one of the great human inventions that figures prominently among others, such as the use of fire, the invention of the wheel, and steam and electric energy used for industry. Generally speaking, cities by means of high levels of population density have created opportunities for increased human cooperation and specialization leading to potential high levels of production, diversity of life styles and subcultures, and openness to innovation, intercultural contact and interethnic relations. So, whether we like it or not, and I am aware that many anthropologists prefer the tribal and rural conditions for their fieldwork above the urban environments, within less than half a century from now the vision of Doxiadis will turn out to have become reality. Perhaps this is already the case now, if transport and communication lines are considered integral parts of the world city, since there exists a network of airlines, telephone, fax and e-mail that connects all the centers. This system is nowadays conceived as consisting of mega-urban areas of different levels. This hierarchy has Tokyo, London and New York as global cities topping several layers of lower level centers and performing distinctive functions in the globalized world of financial flows.

In his work on Southeast Asia with Robinson, McGee states that mega-cities are rapidly expanding beyond their boundaries. 'This process' - I quote - 'has particularly affected the largest cities, but is also now occurring in the largest secondary ones, such as Chiang Mai in Thailand, Bandung in Indonesia, and Cebu City in the Philippines. Metropolitan growth tends to sprawl along major expressways and railroad lines radiating out from the urban cores, and leapfrogs in all directions, putting down new towns and industrial estates. Regions of dense population and mixed land use are created, in which traditional agriculture is found side by side with modern factories, commercial activities, and suburban development.'[3] The concept of the extended metropolitan region or *desakota* zones (Bahasa Indonesia for village-town zones), has been coined for this amoebae-like spatial form of region-based urbanization, which seems diametrically opposed to the city-based urbanization to which we are accustomed. These urban regions have several components such as the 'city-core', the 'metropolitan area', and the 'extended metropolitan area', the last constituting a patched area of mixed agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Pertinently, mega-urban regions may follow divergent patterns of spatial growth. An example of the 'expanding state model' is the growth triangle of Singapore, also involving part of Malaysian Johor and Indonesian Riau. Kuala Lumpur is a case in point following the 'extended metropolitan region model' and Jakarta, Manila, and Bangkok are examples of 'high-density extended metropolitan regions'.

I present these concepts to you for two reasons. The first is to show that we are dealing with new urban phenomena, which cannot be analyzed with ideas developed for the reality

of the ancient town or the old metropolis in mind. Many of these ideas are obsolete and are inapplicable to mega-urban regions. The large size of cities, for example, need not be a problem in itself. Contrary to the general run of feelings, such regions can also be sustainable, and need not be economically parasitic. Cogently, these regions are certainly not only cities of the poor, although many poor live there, but it is proven that the poor often have better chances and are better off in cities than they are in the rural areas. Moreover, concepts like town and countryside are difficult to apply to such diverse regions as these mega-urban areas.

The second reason that I present these terms is that I do not find them very satisfying. Concepts like *desakota zones* have an oriental and mystic spell, but they are not well defined. However, they refer to all sorts of new urban conditions that should be studied and theoretically grasped by anthropologists. Urgent anthropology has an important task to document perishing cultures. But a new laboratory of urban life styles and subcultures is generated in mega-urban settings, which also deserve urgent attention by anthropologists. I do not know if the anthropological community is ready for this shift in emphasis, which however, in the end will be inescapable. Therefore, I am very glad and excited that the Chinese anthropologists who have no long tradition in urban anthropological research, but do have a long urban tradition, are the first to organize an IUAES intercongress completely devoted to urban settings, and have constituted a strong urban anthropological association. As Aidan Southall put it, urban anthropology has become 'the humble and appropriate instrument chosen at this juncture to bear the burden and the excitement of exploration and discovery in China'[4], and particularly urban China, I would add. I am convinced that the existing relationship between the IUAES (International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences) and the CUAA (China Urban Anthropological Association), as well as the personal relationships immanent to the cooperation, will prove to be fertile soil for further exchange of anthropological knowledge in the future.

Some time ago I flew from Yogyakarta via Jakarta to Banda Aceh, the capital of the Indonesian province of Aceh in the northern part of the island of Sumatra. In the framework of a project on traditional houses in Sumatra, which had to be documented as they are rapidly disappearing, I had taken up the task to do research in this city that I did not know, and where I knew nobody.[5] While exploring the city, I found out that traditional wooden houses still existed in the periphery of the city, but also that modern buildings in the center were very peculiar. It appeared that a branch of modern ethnic architecture had developed as an expression of Acehnese identity. So, I decided to do research among the architects who designed these building. I visited them at their offices, ate with them, toured the buildings they had designed with them, visited their homes and recreated with them at the beach. However, as they lived scattered over the city, this type of urban research differs from research in more homogeneous social settings. I discovered that there were five generations of architects, who all had different views on the matter of ethnic architecture and criticized each other, especially the younger generation criticizing the older generation. However, I refer to this because one senior architect of about 70 years old, who was unable to draw at his drawing board longer than ten minutes at a time anymore because of eye problems, made an important statement. He said that when he started his career, he had to make a choice: he would either design in a modern way or he would design in an ethnic way. He had to make the choice between going global or going local. And this brings me to what I pointed out earlier, that a new mindset is needed to deal with mega-urban regions because the old concepts are not applicable anymore. Probably the recent work of Castells on the Network Society, which is a very thorough specification of the processes of globalization and localization in he present-day world, can provide us with such a new mindset.[6]

According to Castells' theory, a new phase in societal development has to be added to the scheme of modes of production by Marx. The Asiatic mode, ancient mode, feudal mode, and capitalistic mode are at this very moment bit by bit and irregularly substituted by the informational mode of production. Ecumenopolis will not be more of the same, but it will be very different from what we have now. Castells has tried to analyze the impact of the digital revolution on society, among others production, labor, consumption, politics and the state, international crime networks, the family system and grassroots social movements, the latter being his old time trade. I cannot present all his interesting findings here, because they are so rich and varied. Basically, he thinks that the new production forces of the digital revolution lead

to new production relations and new world-views. The production relations are globalizing and take the network format of flexible and hierarchical relationships. In reaction to the global flows of capital and information circulating between regions and groups, as well as the resulting uniformity, reactive and proactive, localized identities are formed. The state and politics are strongly influenced by these dual processes because they have to conform to international requirements in the global sphere, but have their constituency on the local level, which they also have to reckon with. So, the state is torn apart and so are politics with probable negative effects on democracy. The central thesis of Castells is that the network is becoming the dominant morphology of society. This is a new metaphor, in addition to other metaphors used in social science, such as society as a clock, or as an organism. Now it is society as a computer network. This network is characterized by uneven diffusion throughout the world. Not everybody and not every region is included. The concepts of excluded and included imply new definitions of poverty and class struggle. This simplified presentation of a masterpiece, whatever criticism I may have,[7] is very relevant for us as anthropologists. I think that anthropology has to transfer part of its efforts to the implications of this digital or informational revolution. The personal computer as we use it at the moment, is comparable to the steam engine at the beginning of the industrial revolution. Major transformations in the informational means of production will lead to a complete restructuring of our urban society, and this will open up a laboratory for anthropological research.

This leads us to one final point, related to the concept of the 'symbolic self' as discussed by Walter Goldschmidt.[8] I will leave aside that the symbolic self by the use of computers and Internet interaction will acquire a complete new level in virtual reality, which may transform into real virtuality. It is clear that virtual culture has to become a topic for anthropological research. What is also important, is that cities and mega-urban regions are saturated with symbolism. Cities are containers of rituals and symbols which, to a certain extent, are already studied by anthropologists. During the Beijing 2000 Inter-Congress, a session was dedicated to rituals and festivals among others in Osaka, Kobe and Yunnan. These studies, however, often remain restricted to a particular symbol or ritual without relating it to the whole body of such symbolic expressions of the city or the mega-urban region. Anthropologists have in a crude way characterized cities as wholes, but it is only since the beginning of the 1990s that the symbolic and ritual dimensions of urban communities have been more systematically explored to characterize them as wholes in an anthropological and not a sociological or geographical way. This is important, as there exists besides a symbolic self also a symbolic self of cities. This becomes particularly clear when present-day strategies of city marketing even on an international scale are taken into account. The symbolic and ritual dimensions of urban regions as expressed in monuments, statues, place and street names, festivities, ritual, myths, stories and poems, architecture and so on and so forth, is a historically layered, sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally produced body of often ambiguous meanings that encompass the traumas, achievements, intentions and hopes of the multi-faceted urban community. This landscape of meanings is a fertile soil for anthropological investigation, not just for the sake of knowledge, but also for the sake of community building as part of applied anthropological interest.

I would like to express the hope that the IUAES Inter-Congress in Beijing has laid further foundations to develop anthropology in the new directions that our changing world is demanding. Probably it is not just by accident that the Chinese anthropologists have chosen urban anthropology as the means to establish a platform for international cooperation and to foster their own scientific performance. As we see in the rapidly developing urban environments around us in Beijing, and in what is also known from the Pearl River Delta economic and spatial transition, China is facing a huge leap forward, this time not by agricultural and rural development, but by the formation of mega-urban regions.

ABSTRACT More and more, anthropologists will be forced to direct their attention towards the mega-urban areas that, increasingly, are dominating societies in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In this contribution based on the closing lecture delivered at the IUAES Inter-Congress held in Beijing, 28 July 2000, Peter J.M. Nas emphasizes the fundamental social transformations that are taking place moving us towards an urbanized and informational society. He makes a case for anthropological research on different types of mega-urban regions and their cultural and symbolic characteristics. Cities and urban regions are containers of rituals and symbols. They have to be studied holistically.

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