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The Metropolis

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The metropolis is a unique type of city that serves as a reference point for our global urban system. The metropolis may also be regarded as a potential role model – "a center and symbol of our times" (Kasinitz 1995). Here, developments may often be observed at an early stage that later develop a wider, more general significance. That is precisely why the metropolis is described as an "observation post" or a "laboratory of modernity" (Matejowski 2000). The core research function of metropolitan studies is thus to explain why a certain city develops into a metropolis or is regarded as such.

Term, History, Definition

The term metropolis originally defined a relationship between various settlements and a certain city – the metropolis. In ancient Greece, a metropolis was the source or home city of a colonial settlement. The Greek term metropolis (μητρόπολις) means home city but also implies the connotation of a capital or global city. Athens, Corinth and Syracuse are examples of such metropolises. Syracuse on Sicily was itself a colony of the Greek town Corinth and later served as a staging post for colonial settlements such as Kamarina. In antiquity, the cultural and economic importance of Syracuse was comparable to that of New York 2,000 years later. And New York, as the name implies, is a European colonial settlement, originally christened "Nieuw Amsterdam".

During late antiquity, the term metropolis was used to denote Roman provincial capitals in the Eastern part of the empire and quickly obtained ecclesiastical significance, as it was used to describe a province consisting of several dioceses headed by a senior bishop called metropolitan. For instance, Los Angeles and the German capital Berlin are still seats of a metropolitan today. During the period of European colonialism, the metropolis came to

denote a relationship of colonial dependence: metropolis – more precisely *metropole* (England), *métropole* (France), *metrópole* (Portugal) - denoted the European homeland that founded the colony. In England, the term was also used to imply the capital London.

During the 20th century, the term metropolis began to be used as a term in public planning to denote areas of entwinement. The American *metropolitan statistical areas* refers to urban agglomerations according to the size of their population. The French *métropoles d'équilibre* were intended as counterweights to the dominant capital region of Paris, a Sixties planning concept that is considered a failure today. We also find a term that competes with the metropolis: Megalopolis, the Greek term for a city, used to describe very large urban agglomerations. The prime example of a megalopolis is BosWash, an urban area with a length of more than 750 km with more than 40 million inhabitants that stretches from Boston via New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore to Washington, D.C.. The term megacities is relatively new and is used mainly to describe the phenomenon of rapidly growing cities with a population of more than 10 million in developing countries.

The View Of Urban Geography

From the perspective of urban geography, the unique relationship between a metropolis versus other cities is characterized by its centrality and relative dominance. A metropolis is a central space of national importance. In this context, Dirk Bronger (2004) introduced a series of parameters. He characterized the metropolis using its *functional primacy*: The metropolis dominates the economical, political and cultural processes of a country. Classic examples are Paris and London. Thus *metropolization* describes the process of concentration of certain functions (= functional primacy) and population (= demographic primacy) in the various cities of a country. Currently this process can be observed in Asian and Latin American megacities such as Seoul, Jakarta or Mexico City.

Bronger introduced three parameters for the metropolis. The metropolis is defined by: (1) a minimum size of one million inhabitants, (2) a minimum population density of 2,000 inhabitants/sqkm and (3) a monocentric structure. Cities generally are focal points of density. Density is an integral component of the urban landscape. Thus the definition of a minimum population density seems sound. A town such as Chongqing in China therefore cannot qualify

as a metropolis: Chongqing believes itself to be the largest city on the globe; it is twice the size of The Netherlands and displays roughly the same population density. The monocentric criterion on the other hand, disqualifies polycentric urban agglomerations such as the Ruhr valley, the heartland of the 19th century steel industry in Germany, from being considered a metropolis. This approach is not undisputed in academic research as the urban agglomeration in the Rhine-Ruhr area is considered a megacity. On the other hand, many modern-day metropolises evolved through the amalgamation of several town and villages. In modern Berlin, Berlin Road, the name of the street that once led *to* Berlin, is one of the most prevalent street names. Therefore a polycentric structure may also be regarded as a type of transitory form.

Bronger's definition of urban geography is based on today's conditions and is only of relative historical value. Syracuse, the ancient New York, possessed no more than 100,000 inhabitants. When looking at the modern metropolis, however, it is helpful to track the development of its urban population and to determine when it first exceeded one million. For instance, Bombay, the modern Mumbai, already had more than one million inhabitants in 1910, whereas Lagos needed until the 1960ies to reach an equivalent population. However, in the meantime the population of Lagos is growing markedly faster than that of modern Mumbai. Thus the ancillary problems, for instance, for its infrastructure, are more grievous and prevent sustainable urban development.

The World City Approach

The Metropolis is often equated to a global city. Research into global cities is of prime importance today. Its premier exponents are John Friedmann, Saskia Sassen and Peter J. Taylor. Bronger pointed out that research into global cities already commenced in the 1930ies with the rise of Berlin and Konrad Olbricht's studies.

The most important premise of modern research into global cities is the globalization that affects flows information, capital and goods. Global cities are the modern entrepots of globalization. Friedmann (1995) accounted for this fact in the five principles of global city research that he created: (1) Global cities are the centers of all types of flows and trends: Goods, capital, people, information, and so on. (2) The global accumulation of capital is

concentrated in a network of global cities. (3) Global cities are defined by concentrated processes of exchange and not by urban boundaries or other politico-administrative definitions. (4) There is a hierarchy of global cities that is currently dominated by New York, Tokyo and London. (5) The dominant culture in global cities is cosmopolitan and transnational.

The sociologist Saskia Sassen is responsible for the modern understanding of the term global city (see also Sassen 1991). Global cities are the command centers of the globalized economy. The urban landscape and structures of global cities are designed for their globalized functions and the requirements of transnational enterprises. This entails a specific social polarization: Apart from mobile professionals, for instance in the banking sector, there is a myriad of badly paid, small service providers – pizza services, cleaners, security and transportation services and so on. Taylor and "Globalization and World Cities Group" (GaWC) examined the connectivity between world cities and drew conclusions as to the concentration of functions (for instance in the financial sector) and the hierarchical position of the individual world city. (The German research into metropolitan regions in the meantime has also turned to using the function definitions employed by research into world cities.)

Approaches For A Theory In Metropolitan Studies

Research into world cities, as defined by Friedmann, is also an approach to metropolitan studies. Its task is to explain why certain cities develop into a metropolis, respectively, are regarded as such. Basically, there are three theoretical approaches that provide slightly different answers.

- 1) *Endogenic growth*: World cities profit from advantages of location accumulated over the course of time. As of a certain size, a multitude and large variety of urban resources enable a relatively long-term development advantage. Large numbers of modern day metropolises such as New York, London and Tokyo are port towns: the flow of goods and people provides a vast range of income opportunities. For centuries, London profited from its function as a harbor and capital of an economically active global empire. The majority of geographical research into world cities or megacities uses the endogenic growth paradigm.

- 2) *Power*: A different approach states that the metropolis develops its position through power or rather an abuse of power. In this case, the importance of the metropolis as a colonial staging post comes into play. The metropolis exercises power through nation states or the activities of global enterprises that have been founded or are located there. This concept is used by the dependence theory (e.g., André Gunder Frank, Raúl Prebisch, Volker Bornschier) that gained some political and practical relevance in Latin American countries in the 1960ies. A similar paradigm is used by the regulation theory (Alain Lipietz) and – with restrictions — by the concept of the post-modern city (Edward Soja). Following this interpretation, the importance of the metropolis London is due mainly to its colonial history; London's global function as a financial centre and international air traffic hub are unthinkable without its colonial power accumulation.

- 3) *Civilization production*: The metropolis may also be considered with a view to its performance in the production of civilization. Modern - Western – culture and economies are an urban phenomenon. Urban culture and economies provide for forms of organization and integration that promote urbanization. In this sense, the metropolis is highly productive and serves as a role model for other cities. Cities create prosperity and possess an intrinsically symbolic function: The metropolis stands for constantly new and modern forms of human cohabitation. Whereas the first two approaches do not necessarily imply that a metropolis must be a city, the production of civilization requires a certain complexity and concentration of exchange processes. Handling complexity requires constantly shifting institutional arrangements – the multitude of unplanned interactions thus provides a creative impetus in the metropolis. Georg Simmel (1903) described cities similarly. UN-habitat, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, uses a similar line of argumentation.

The three theories of metropolitan studies define paradigms that are not mutually exclusive. What counts is the core explanation: Is the current importance of London the result of a specific long-term development advantage or the result of a position of power based on its colonial history? Or did London manage to reinvent itself at the turn of the millennium to become a reference point for the production of culture. The various theories not only provide different answers, they also entail different foci for urban governance with regard to the

policies employed for communal business development, urban development or image building.

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