



On Transition to Postmodernity and the Role of an 'Ideal City' Modeling

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Abstract: The shaping of global society is now often accompanied with theoretical and spatial developments of an 'Ideal Global City' model. A compiling of such models is tightly dependent on the understanding of the role of civil society and its organizations in modern life ranging from the grassroots to social movements of various kinds. Drawing on the study of past and current concepts of the society-city-grassroots relationships evolution, some empirical studies including three international research projects in which I took part, I came to the following conclusions. History of sociology and political sciences showed that the topic of the city-grassroots (within the frames of philosophy and social sciences relationships) has discussed from ancient times up to now. Civil society forces not only indispensable part of many 'ideal cities' theoretical versions but one of the most important drivers of the development of the conceptual frameworks and projects of future society. With every change of a mode of production i.e. in every 'transition period' of particular society development civil society organizations and movements came to the forefront. In each such period a conflict type of relationships between old institutions and the emerging of new forms of social life is sharpening. The very process of globalization permanently generates new forms of social institutions and public participation in their shaping. To my mind, modern process of globalization has two interrelated sides: according to Z. Bauman and J. Urry, it tend to become totally 'liquid' or mobile and at the same time generated new ideas concerning participation of civil society organizations in construction of safety and wellbeing for all.

Keywords: Civil Society, Globalization, Grassroots, History, Ideal City, Institutions, Mode of Production, Public Participation, Theory, Urban Planning

1. THE ISSUE AND ITS LIMITS

The issue under consideration is so complex, multisided and all-embracing that I'm forced to restrict the following analysis by some topics which seems to me as crucial ones. What may be stated now definitely? **First**, the very idea of making an 'ideal city' as a model of 'ideal society' is going throughout human history. **Second**, in ancient times the people not only attempted to design such cities but to build them in accordance of existed ideology and beliefs. **Third**, in those times the people tried to subordinate their cities' plans as well as their habit of life with dominating ideas concerning their views on the universe. **Fourth**, the reverse side of the same coin had been periodical attempts to oppose the designs of 'ideal cities' and current reality. **Fifth**, such opposition is going on throughout human history but it is indicative that the peaks of political interests to ideal cities designing and construction falls in the turning points of human history irrespectively be it a change of mode of production, social or technological revolutions. **Sixth**, the relationships between current events and the ideal cities modeling depend on the tempo-rhythms of human history. In ancient times the people tried to reproduce the laws of the universe on the ground. Then, a systemic reflection on the current social life led to an appearance of a special category of intellectuals who saw a development of the models of ideal cities as their moral duty and a subject matter of their public interest. **Seventh**, to my mind, today there is no sense to construct the enclaves of ideal settings within uncertain, socially-polarized and politically-contradictory global and national milieu.

Eighth, nowadays, the situation has sharply changed one again. On the one hand, a new scientific and technological revolution (or the Fourth industrial revolution, hereafter, the STR-4) tend to shape a united living space of the earth. The space has been conquered by the time. On the other hand, political contradictions and social inequalities were not overcome. On the contrary, these contradictions and inequalities have become interdependent and mutually-penetrated. Not only the media but the people themselves have become the forces that tend to transform our planet into contradictory and chaotic melting pot burdened with global warming and other ecological threats. The question arises again: Is in such unstable and risky global situation reasonable to continue to develop of ideal cities models?

Ninth, I think that it is do reasonable. But it should be going on not only about already existing cities and regions but about the *new more complex, safe and at the same time more mobile model of a global scale*. And only within it there is a sense to design or to model ideal settlements of various types. It doesn't mean that the past experience is obsolescent and has to be neglected. This experience has to be accumulated and carefully studied because the humanity cannot exist without permanent looking back and forward. As to current times, it seems to me that global scientific community together with grassroots and social movements should to consider modern megalopolises as a testing ground for the development of ideal cities of tomorrow.

2. THEORY, METHOD AND SOURCES

The points of departure are as following. From the ancient times and up to now any ideal city theorists or political practitioners proceed from a critical assessment of current state of matters and offered a set of measures to radically improve it. That is, these theorists and politicians based on already existing knowledge accessible to them related not only to institutional activity but to civil society as well.

Then, this situation was peculiar to a long period of human history because there was not such branch of scientific knowledge as prognostics of civil society development at all. On the one hand, almost all religious systems imposed strict limits on scientific forecasting. All forms of human activity have to be organized and implemented in a strict accordance with religious norms and rules. Therefore, on the other hand, politicians never experimented with forms of social and political life of local communities. For a long time political institutions and forms of social life had been subjected to established social institutions i.e. had been shaping 'from above'. Of course, these institutions and rules produced by them had been different in many societies populated the world. And the process of transformation of these institutions took sometimes several centuries. Even in early XX century both in Europe and America mass migration influx and the necessity to understand its political, economic, social and cultural consequences forced the sociologists and newspapers' reporters so-called muckrakers (and not politicians!) to form such multidimensional discipline as human ecology (Park et al., 1926). These events signified the emergence a bottom-up i.e. empirical sociology that aimed at the study and conceptualization of human activity at ground level. That is, at the level of individual and grassroots activities.

It's indicative that after a set of experiments of construction the Garden cities of tomorrow (Howard, 1902) and works of Greek urban planner K. Doxiadis there were a lot of various plans of the 'ideal cities' but it have been a variety of cities' plans – a city as a tree, tower, vertical, horizontal, linear, floating, etc. – and not complex social-political-cultural model of an ideal city (see details in, Romanova, 2015). Nevertheless, it's interesting that in the 1960s Greek urbanist K. Doxiadis offered a concept of ekistics, the science of projecting and building systems of cities across the world. Doxiadis was one of the first who offered concepts of ecumenopolis i.e. a global city in which he offered a variety of forms of human life organization and self-organization at the ground level. Doxiadis was one among the few global theorists who understood that the functioning of global city cannot be regulated 'top-down' only.

3. NEW CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

First, our world is in the state of growing uncertainty, unpredictability and unintended consequences. As U. Beck pointed out more than 20 years ago, we are living in a society of 'side effects' (1996 by Beck, 1999). It means that humanity is still not adapted and couldn't adequately to respond to a speed of a gird of ongoing transformations in natural, social, political and technical systems. What are the reasons? The processes of 'inversion' of space into time, unprecedented growth of mobility of events, goods, peoples, climate fluctuations (Urry, 2008), the process of compression of doubled living space

(material and virtual ones), and the processes of metabolism as a result of interactions of natural, social and technical systems to which social sciences pay still insufficient attention.

Second, we are living not only in a 'global risk society' (Beck, 1999) but in a totally risky environment, be it natural, social, political or technical ones. And this is not an image or slogan but an all-embracing and all-penetrating reality which all living species cannot escape. More than that, this living environment has become complex that is we are now living in an integrated global socio biotechnical system (the SBT-system) which may generate not only cumulative but a cascade effects. It means that a particular place (site, territory, infrastructure, technical construction) which has been relatively safe five minutes ago might be suddenly transformed into a very risky one.

Third, K. Schwab (2016) and many other western technocratic-oriented theorists argue that labor market will be rapidly shrinking in the coming decades under the development of 'smart machines' and other forms of robots. And simultaneously this market will be quickly polarized into very small creative minority and jobless or lived on the welfare majority. These adversarial processes will proceed under conditions of unstable and unpredictable world burdened by social conflicts, wars and rapid growth of military expenses. Plus manual governance and control, natural disasters and man-made catastrophes, global warming, mass migration flows and so on and so forth.

Fourth, as Z. Bauman referring to works of Ilya Prigogine argued, we are now living in 'dissipative systems' that is in the systems which are unable to recover on their own. Under these extremely unstable conditions the selves cannot reproduce and preserve themselves. In other words, we will soon live or already living in a highly risky world. Bauman cited Noble laureate J. Stiglitz: 'We have empty homes and homeless people' as an expression of utmost inequality in the modern world (Bauman and Raud, 2017: 121,122). That is, an inequality and its negative consequences will grow.

What are the main consequences of the above transformations? I put forward such negative effect as an *emanation of energy of decay*. A dark side of 'peaceful' developmental processes is the production of wastes, be it liquid or solid wastes or the 'wasted people' (Bauman's term) who will be thrown out of human community forever. This thesis is correct in relation to any living species. In sum, a diversity of natural and social world is quickly diminishing. Besides, natural disasters and man-made catastrophes produce the same negative result. But according to any system theory, this diversity is indispensable prerequisite of relative sustainability of natural and man-made systems. Finally, insufficient scientific knowledge about global metabolic processes and their immediate and distant effects leads to further natural and human losses. Finally, let me remind that any recovering of affected territories and waste recycling requires energy, knowledge and other resources. And every delay of the above works means additional expenses of money and other resources.

Then, the more the *ideology and practice of consumerism* will be propagated by the mass-media the more negative unintended consequences and risks will be produced. The western societies are risked to appear within this vicious circle. That is why I see any attempts to construct local 'safety zones' like closed neighborhoods for the rich within modern cities as a very doubtful enterprise. Growing consumerism coupled with growing inequality and resource deficit (say, energy or drinking water) is a deadlock prospect of global development.

After then, the speeding up of overall global transformations (or, more exactly, of tempo-rhythms of transformations of parts of global whole) are leading to substantial changes in global social order. The principles of world global order and its institutions are now subjected to critics as they are not fit to the character and tempo-rhythms of ongoing transformations. A global political community is again 'in-between.' On the one hand, world institutions and legislation are still at work. But the further the more they are lag behind of a variety and the tempo-rhythms of ongoing global transformations. On the other hand, temporal agreements, uninterrupted talks and 'frozen conflicts' are the realities of everyday political practice. How to overcome this gap? The following measures and instruments are in use: the governance by means of mass-media; a practice of politically-constructed events which works in accordance with the principle 'highly likely'; and the manual (hand) control. That is, one more example of 'in-between' mode of governance: a combination of a 'dramatizing' i.e. socially-constructed reality and means of authoritarian control. From my viewpoint, the above measures are insufficient and sometimes even dangerous.

All ongoing transformations and contradictions are well seen in modern mega-cities. Drawing on the analysis of current Russian and foreign works on urbanization and mega-cities, on a set of international research projects (some of them with my own participation) I see that an issue of modern

urban politics and in particular of mega-cities has to be further developed. The main challenges to urban politics seem to me as the following: a city as a consumer-oriented sociobiotechnical-system; growing production and accumulation of seen and overt wastes and risks; human consequences of total virtualization; the 'strength of the weakness' phenomenon as a result of globally-embracing information systems; crash of a primary eco-structure as a basis of human privacy; separation and isolation of the rich and the poor; reemergence of grassroots activism and urban social movements; a necessity of co-ordination of numerous forms of global-local activity.

I see especially necessary to focus on such issues as: a growing uncertainty of globalization and its impact on daily life of urban residents; the emergence of three main archetypes of urban life, 'normal' i.e. relatively sustainable, mobilization and critical that are co-existed and interdependent; a growing role mass-media and personality in the mega-cities taming; a further destruction of privacy; and a necessity of shaping and development of interdisciplinary (cross-disciplinary) urban politics. I'd especially underline the importance of designing and use of nature-like materials and infrastructures in all spheres of urban life. If 'ideal cities' is really possible they will be shaped on the ground of national and global mega-cities or cross-national settlements like the New Silky Road which in the stage of discussion and designing.

4. ON THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT

The second half of XX century has been marked by the rise of civil society activity across the world. It took various forms: national-liberation movements, social movements, environmental movements, charity movements, strikes, protest actions, civil initiatives, grassroots, etc. This shift has been carefully studied by the US and European sociologists namely by M. Castells (1983), Della Porta, M. Diani, B. Klandermans, H. Kriesi, M.Zald and J. McCharty, Ch. Tilly and by many others. In Russia in spite of political restrictions the Nature protection movement has been developed from the 1920s onwards, in the midst of the 1960s the Students' nature protection movement (so called Druzhina Movement) has emerged and so on.

Here are the examples related to the projects on the role of public participation in European cities including the Soviet ones in the 1980s (Deelstra and Yanitsky, 1991). **First**, we revealed that the study of public participation tends to be interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral ones. This fact was had been unintended for us because in the process of compiling the project's prospect we didn't put such task. Surely, as a former urbanist I considered public participation as a natural result of collective efforts of various professionals and the residents. **Second**, it had been indicative that the most developed European countries as the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK gave us the most interesting and promising examples.

Third, in the Soviet Union the 1986-91s years was the period of *total perestroika* accompanied with sharp mobilization of civil society forces recruiting the people from all strata of our society, from urban residents to scientists, doctors, artists, municipal administrators, servicemen, militia and other social and political groups. At the same time Soviet civil society began quickly politicized, new political parties have emerged from anarchists to conservators, from backers of market economy to its adversaries. The perestroika years had been a giant melting pot of various kinds of grassroots activities (Yanitsky, 1996).

Fourth, although this European research project hadn't been oriented to trace grassroots activity development in time and space (i.e. it hadn't been a longitude) the majority of its participants traced a chain of the steps of involvement of new agents in the participation processes.

Fifth, in parallel particular participants of the project fixed the changes in particular urban milieu. Here is the only one example of such chain of transformations related to public participation in revitalizing the old inner cities and towns of the UK: the population outflow from these cities – creation of initiative group from professionals and local residents – the development of the ideas and draft-plans of these cities revitalizing by the joint efforts of local residents and various professionals – discussions-work-discussions both within initiative group and with representatives of municipal authorities, businessmen – the beginning of actual revitalization of such cities – return back some strata of their population – their involvement in the above project of a city rebirth, etc. As British urban planner and public figure R. Hackney underscored, 'An immediate and complete reappraisal is needed of the legislation affecting inner cities. Rules and regulations need to be relaxed. Private sector and government need to take risks... Problems must be tackled locally; those involved should work

from offices in the very areas in which the work is situated. Only by tackling problems at this grassroots level will they be solved.' And the most important recommendation: 'A national retraining program for ordinary people to go back to school and learn the responsibility of looking after the needs of their areas is a must. Human endeavor is our greatest resource and people must be encouraged to take a lead. They must be able to articulate their case and their views and they themselves must be encouraged to take the positive action which others can follow' in constructing alternative ways out (Hackney, 1991: 213-225).

The times of the 1990-2000s in Europe and Russia had been the period of substantial transformations. The Europe built the European Union whereas Russia experienced a hard transition from socialist mode of production to capitalist ones. Plus in all scientific communities across the globe it has been a period of comprehension of a globalization phenomenon. That is why the issues of grassroots and social movements went down on global political agenda. Nevertheless some very promising works related to social movement theory had been implemented (see, for example: Diani and McAdam, 2003; Della Porta and Diani, 2006).

But from the beginning of XXI century the above theoretical and political activity began to slow down. The coming of global capitalism based on the new information technologies, global transnationals shaping, a global mobility growth including mass migration flows generated by local and civil wars, ethno-confessional conflicts – all these processes coupled together became to the center of scientific interest and took the first lines on the global political agenda. As I. Prigogine and U. Beck predicted, the world community has become risky, unstable and full of unintended consequences. The other side of the same coin is a rapid development of the *sphere of social constructivism in the politics*, media and in many other spheres of social life. The 'class' of professional social constructors has been quickly shaped. More than that, this constructive activity has gained a high public status whereas a science as social institution excepting some spheres which brings high profit or were necessary for national defense gradually lost its social status and public prestige. In sum, it seemed sometimes that the era of grassroots activism came to the end.

In the end of the second decade of the 2000s a flow of publications on grassroots activity has suddenly emerged. And this flow came from various parts of the world, from Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Mexico, Brazil, the UK and other countries. But why is? I've several explanations of this phenomenon. First of all, it has been a reaction to already well-seen negative consequences of one-sided globalization and first of all to the activity of its drivers, the transnational. The new round of struggle for nature-states resource independence began. Then, mass migration flows from Africa and the Near East toward the EU generated a defense reaction: the politics of 'walls building' began. A similar process one can observe in the US which begin to construct the wall between the US and Mexico.

Half-a-century researches by the Club of Rome give no promising results (Von Weizsäcker and Wijkman, 2018). By and large, it becomes clear that nobody is well prepared to impose substantial limits on consumption of the rich as well as on unlimited expansion of global capitalism into natural ecosystems. As Paris summit on global warming clearly showed, there were no serious steps against this expansion. Military expenses, especially of the US, are continuing to grow. World Economic Society has conducted a long-term survey of global risks and global 'hot points' but without any recommendations aimed at their diminishing (the Global Risks, 2018).

After then, the period of uncritical perception of opportunities offered by the IT technologies has passed and the mass of urban residents began to realize that they privacy is in all-penetrating risks and they are absolutely powerless against the Big Brother and numerous hackers and fans of easy money. That is the warnings of global theorists concerning the dialectic of the 'bads' and 'goods' have turned into real threats to a majority of world population. Ordinary people initially inspired by the unlimited possibilities of the Internet and social networks have now realized that these networks are the Janus-like because they are two-ways roots: any individual may enter into an unlimited virtual world but he or she is absolutely open to any agent from the outside. Finally, ordinary people began to realize that being involved in this uncertain and mobile world they lose their identity and any ties with their past, the Motherland and local culture diversity.

5. A NECESSARY TURN

The beginning of the 2000s has passed under the search of optimal form and bright future of 'smart cities.' It was stated that an all-embracing development of information-communication systems would

totally turn over a social and political structure and a life of urban residents. Indeed, substantial transformations have occurred. A lot of routine operations including urban services and some kind of transportation are now realized by robots or via the Internet services. In comparison with the period of 1970-80s the flow of publications on grassroots and social movement activity strongly reduced.

But less than a year ago I notice a strange sign: the term of 'informalities' returned to the mainstream of scientific and public discourse (see, for example, Boudreau and Davis, 2017). The full number of the 'Current Sociology Monograph' (Vol.65, No 2, 2017) has been devoted to the role of the 'informalities' in current modernity. It suddenly appears that informal economy, informal human relationships and many other similar terms and concepts are at work. Let me cite only two names of articles: the 'Rethinking the mismatch between formal policy and informal tactics of citizenship' or the 'Beyond a state-centric approach to urban informality' and so on.

As Boudreau and Davis argued, the modern state developed three main mechanisms through which order and control were formalized: (1) 'the simplification of complex realities through legible instruments (maps, statistical categories, etc.); (2) 'their miniaturization (i.e. the organization of territories into smaller manageable units within which only relevant variables were considered)'; and (3) 'dichotomization, that is, discursive and ideological imperative to separate the formal from the informal, the public and private, the traditional and the modern, or even advanced and the backward. Where all three formalization processes occurred successfully, the resulting modern state was better able to centralize legitimate authority at the expense of other forms of political authority...' (Boudreau and Davis, 2017: 152).

And here is an example from the other part of the world. It is stated that 'Informality in urban India is a constantly moving constellation of activities whose relationships with public-sector bureaucracies and private-sector enterprises can shift over time and space.' And further, the findings 'suggest that rather than *a priori* classifying which people or institutions, activities or land-use are labelled '(in)formal', a relational approach provides a deeper understanding of actually existing practices that define everyday life of urban residents, and which are produced collectively by multiple actors. Likewise, these findings demonstrate that the state is simply one of a number of actors struggling to regulate activity, land-use and service provision in Indian cities' (Schindler, 2017: 257).

And then, the 'ambitions of formalization finds its roots and justification in the Enlightenment's desire for regularity as well as a linear conception of history framed by the ideas of progress and development. It was based on the presupposition that past actions condition the calculated future, thus living little room for considering from the contingencies of present conditions' (Boudreau and Davis, 2017: 153).

As S. Joss summed up, the public city should be re invigorated, and the public should assert the right for public governance. 'Special efforts are required to equip citizens with information and skills to enable them – beyond mere data feeding – to access, analyze and utilize (big) data'... 'The careful design of process to allow individuals and communities to engage meaningfully – that is, with active voice and embedded in decision process—in the smart city' (Joss, 2018).

I fully agree with this critics and the necessity of informal activities studies but all linear concepts of human history has been many times analyzed and criticized by U. Beck (1996, 1999), A. Giddens (1990), A. Touraine (1988), J. Urry (2008) and much earlier by Russian philosopher and sociologist V.I. Soloviev. There is no room for a discussion about a transition from modernity to postmodernity, let me only remind the estimation of major features of postmodernity: an uncertainty, unpredictability (and therefore impossibility for making relevant calculations). We are now really living in the epoch of side-effects.

6. CONCLUSION

As the reader can see, even nowadays when all countries and sciences are involved in the process of theorizing and designing the 'smart' forms of social and political life this process can avoid the central agents of global process – the people and its environment. We are now facing not an easy alternative: either to transfer a global and city governance into the hands of smart machines and to remain the 'animals' in this 'smart zoo', or to actively engage in these multisided transformation processes at all levels, local, regional and global.

In particular it means that the local level—the cities and their neighborhoods— have to be the most important element in any projects of ‘ideal’ future society. To my mind, *the smart city means nothing without consciousness public engagement* in the design, governance, restoration, rehabilitation and other processes of a global whole.

If social life is becoming more and more unstable and unpredictable the character of political activity has to be changed as well. It means, to my mind, that any form of political practice (consultations, talks, roadmaps designing, etc.) has become more relational as well. Uncertain and mobile political world should be considered and governed in relational political and social terms.

In this respect the use of permanent monitoring of diversity of social and political processes is the only one method to follow this diversity and to take timely decisions. It’s indicative that economy, social and military politics use the method of building probable versions i.e. short-term and long-term scenarios of the development of the above processes

In turn, the Enlightenment based on solid scientific basement (principles, laws, theorems, paradigms) has a risk to be transformed into propaganda of consumerism or to be forced out from public arenas. It’s an avoidable process because the consumption and advertising are the driving forces of a capital accumulation. But the outcome of consumerism is well-known: a minority is becoming even more reach and the majority continues to become poor. The only way out are the revitalization of civil society and its organizations striving for the freedom and human rights.

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