



The European Metropolis 1920-2000
Conference sponsored by the European Science Foundation
at
The Centre of Comparative History Berlin
December 2002

Executive Summary

From December 12th. until 14th. a conference on the European Metropolis 1920-2000 was held, which was sponsored by the European Science Foundation. The meeting took place at the Centre of Comparative European History in Berlin. The organiser, Henk van Dijk (Erasmus University Rotterdam) thought, that it was necessary to stimulate the discussion about a phenomenon, which raised a lot of controversy in the beginning of the 20th. century; the large or giant city. It is understandable that much attention has been dedicated to the position and problems of the metropolis during that period. A rather recent overview of this can be found in the excellent book edited by Tony Suttcliffe, *Metropolis 1890-1940*.¹ However, it is clear that not only the position of the European metropolis compared to his counterpart elsewhere changed, but that the discussion about the pros and cons of metropolitan life also lost the sharp dimensions it had at the beginning of the 20th. century. The workshop, in which urban historians, geographers and sociologist participated, was meant as a first attempt to define the position and problems of metropolises during the second half of the 20th. century in Europe.

Scientific content of the event

At the beginning of the twentieth century large or giant cities could be found mostly in Europe and North America (in particular New York). The vast growth of those cities elicited a lurid discussion about the pros and cons of very large urban settlements at that time. Although the urbanisation process speeded up in most European counties at the end of the nineteenth century, the increase of the population of metropolises was so impressive that the demand for urban reform and planning was directed to that type of cities in particular. A whole series of social scientific reports and books have been dedicated to the large cities.

This situation lasted at least to the 1920-ties and 30-ties, although some of the pre-war metropolises slowly saw dissipate their former status in the rank order (Vienna) and others (Moscow) became quite suddenly new-comers by political reasons. At least it was quite clear, on the basis of the megalomaniac urban plans of the 1930-ties and the way of warfare during the Second World War that the metropolis still had a high symbolic value at that time. However, the American metropolises already showed a vaster growth than their European counterparts.

During the period after the Second World War the pre-eminent position of the large cities in Europe in the world rank order definitively came to an end. Not only the North American ones (particularly New York) continued their growth, whereas a whole series of non-European metropolises emerged (some of them with a long-standing tradition already). The reasons for this comparative decrease of the European metropolises were quite clear. The de-



cline of empire, together with a slowing down of the population growth of many European countries and a vast increase of processes of sub-urbanisation had an important impact on the European urban landscape. The rather compact and centralised metropolis gave way to larger urbanised areas (some of them like the *Randstad Holland* and the *Ruhrarea* even without a formal centre or formal administrative boundaries). London, one of the most impressive metropolises of the nineteenth century, became a part of a vast urban landscape with a series of larger and smaller settlements around it. And Paris showed similar features. In both cases, however, the administrative boundaries did not keep pace with the enlargement of the urban area. Both cities not only had a slowing down and a decrease of their population, but also were confronted with a decline of their former industrial position. The third important large city of the pre-war period, Berlin, had a comparable situation, which was aggravated by the political situation in the German capital city.

Although it is very difficult to compare the number of inhabitants for different cities, it is clear that the process of sub-urbanisation was a general problem everywhere. It led to decrease of the population of the metropolises together with an increase in traffic. At the same time the industrial structure of many of the larger cities deteriorated quite quickly and this could not be ameliorated by the development of the service sector. And finally, a new wave of immigrants resulted in new class boundaries. Together with a new series of challenges related to the globalisation of the economy² these developments had an important impact on European metropolises.

Besides the position of the European metropolis in a worldwide perspective (which not only meant that a lot of the European larger cities lost their position within the rank order of cities), the effects of the decline of industry and the coming of a 'post-industrial society' are important themes in the research of the metropolitan topic at the turn of the century. Population growth, inner city developments, social segregation and the expansion of producer services are some key variables in that context.

Contributions

In his words of welcome on behalf of the Centre for Comparative European History Hartmut Kaelble stated that urban history and urban studies showed a remarkable revival during the past years. The conference as such could be seen as a good example of these developments. However, at the same time it seems to be doubtful to call contemporary Berlin a metropolis. A comparison with London and Paris could be very difficult, because not only the formal position as a capital city is important, but also a series of other (quantitative and qualitative) characteristics. It is for that reason that e.g. in German the word *Grossstadt* is more common as metropolis.

Henk van Dijk started his contribution with two pictures: One from Fritz Lang's film "Metropolis" and one of the skyline of New York on September 11th. 2001. Both pictures represented, in a combination of reality and virtual reality, the dominant metropolitan myth in the 1920-ties and at the beginning of the 21st. Century. The debate on the effects of 'metropolisation', which was quite strong at the beginning of the 20th century, slowed down during the rest of the century. Only recently a new interest in the problems and position of the metropolis is



visible. However, the position of the European metropolis is now by no means comparable with the mega cities elsewhere. That does not mean that the position of the metropolis in Europe is unproblematic. Not only changes in the rank order and in the urban networks can be investigated, but also interior problems related to de-industrialisation, the development of the service sector and new social boundaries related to immigration.

In the first contributions the focus was on the problems of urban networks. Bert van der Knaap and Ronald Wall gave an overview of the development of the Service Sector and its influence on new urban networks in the second half of the twentieth century based on the example of the *Randstad Holland*. This economic sector led to a higher concentration of larger urban settlements and a strengthening of the middle urban centres. This caused the development of a flowing network structure with several centres. Urban systems did not develop in a linear way from a system of hierarchical central places into networks, but were characterised by a hybrid hierarchical as well fluid organisation.

Paul van de Laar and Pim Kooij presented the *Randstad Holland* as an example of a floating metropolis too. This horseshoe form urbanised area in the western part of the Netherlands consists of a series of larger towns, like Amsterdam, the Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht with a not very densely population in the centre (the so-called green heart). Together with a series of smaller towns and sub-urbanised areas it is a true urban region, but without a formal common administration. Until now it was quite difficult to develop a policy of regional integration. Moreover, rivalries between urban centres, e.g. in the field of tourism, or economic or cultural policies seem to be quite normal. As a result of post-industrial development, de-industrialisation and change in economic structures it is possible to detect a change from a more polycentric structure towards a more bipolar system, in which an increasing contrast between a northern and a southern part is visible.

In Michael Hoyler's contribution an overview was given about attempts to conceptualise European urban space and the links between urban centres during the last fifty years. He described the development from a normative, hierarchical and national model towards a more descriptive, polycentric network structure.

Based on the former contribution Peter Taylor explained the outcome of the research of the *Globalization and World Cities Study Group and Network*. He showed the quantitative aspects of the networks in specific sectors based on the analysis of the Internet sites of several hundreds of firms and organisations, which are important for the economic development of economic sectors in the process of globalisation. Interestingly he could show that Nairobi is the global centre of NGOs at this moment. Moreover, it was remarkable that in the light of the general position of the European cities in the global urban network, London as centre of the Commonwealth still is quite important in the New Economy and in some cases still dominates the rank order before New York.

After discussion about the network approaches and in particular the implications of the views on urbanisation in the publications of Saskia Sassen and Manuel Castells on globalisation and urban networks, Jim Bater changed the attention towards inner urban problems. He sketched the intra-urban relationship between centre and periphery based on the development of the city centres of Moscow and St. Petersburg in the 1990-ties. The transition towards a



market economy, led to important changes in the use of land and property. Based on the outcome of surveys Bator showed that together with demographic decline and commercialisation, the social structure of the inner cities altered significantly. In particular in St. Petersburg the gentrification was quite visible, whereas in Moscow in particular the elderly women were driven to the edge of the city. In both cities there was a concentration of professional marketing in the centres.

Richard Rodger's contribution was a broad paper on the different meanings of the word "Metropolis" since the 16th century. Although in the later Middle Ages the metropolis had a connotation in the framework of religious institutions, already during the 16th and 17th it was used in a more secular meaning for London as the capital city. Whereas, in the beginning the word metropolis was used in a positive way, it was during the 19th century that the word got a more negative meaning too. In the discourse about London (which can be followed in the electronic citation index of the Times) a growing opposition against the tendency towards centralisation can be seen. Since the 20th century the negative view was linked with a growing interest in administrative reform on the European continent, in particular Paris and Berlin.

Lars Nilsson's contribution was dedicated to a typical medium-sized city and centre of a national market, Stockholm. After a period of demographic crisis and an anti-urban suburbanisation in the 20th century, a period with successful reconstruction of the inner city followed. The outcome of this process was quite positive during the last years. Nilsson showed that after a period (during the heydays of the Swedish welfare state) in which the main movement was towards the suburbs, the inner city gained a new attraction for more well to do inhabitants developed. This trend resulted in an important reconstruction policy since the 1980-ties.

Marjatta Hietala's paper focussed on the potential innovation power of Helsinki. At least since the Pisa report on higher education we know that Finland is a leading country in this field and it is well known that the Finnish people have more mobile telephones than the Italians. However, one can question what factors were dominant in this process of innovation, in which the Finnish capital plays an important role? According to Hietala it was the strong national identity after the Finnish independency in 1917, together with a rather open class structure, a good educational system, knowledge of languages, mobility, openness and flexibility, which influenced this success story within the Scandinavian context. It was the capital city, Helsinki, which tried to cope with the metropolises in Europe and to concur also in the field of architecture and urban planning. In particular if we look at the contemporary development towards the service society she underlined the gender specific segregation of the urban society and pointed at the role of women in the Helsinki labour market and in urban society in general.³

Opposite to the thesis of Hietala for Helsinki, Magda Pinheiro's contribution for Lisbon was less positive. Since the 1970-ties the population of greater Lisbon is increasing, but at the same time still uncontrolled building activity is taking place, which spreads housing over the boundary of the Lisbon area. A realistic concept for the improvement of public transport lacked too. As well as in the centre as in the periphery of the city a clear social segregation developed, which became quite visible for public opinion after the city fire in 1991. Pinheiro's contribution paid attention to the difficulties older metropolises had in the process of modernisation and

renovation. In particular, the existence of a formal legal city together with an informal illegal one, seems to be difficult.

Although in the media most attention is going to the city centre of Berlin, the contribution of Heinz Reif was directed to the Berlin suburbs and their cultural attraction during the 20th century. In the early phase of sub-urbanisation of the German capital city, which developed during the same period as the making of the German railroad network, it was a combination of infrastructure and the position of social actors (bankers, property investors and architects), which determined the process of sub-urbanisation. The demand of the middle classes for a more social homogeneous living area together with a boom in building led to an early development of a social bipolar structure. Whereas the Berlin Wall had been an artificial threshold for the growth of the Berlin after World War II, after the German unification a new outward movement started again, in particular because many former inhabitants of Eastern Berlin thought to realise their dreams about a small house in the greens. However, at this moment the disillusion about the lack of possibilities in the countryside seems to grow, but it is not clear what effects they will have in the future.

Martin Kraaijestein tried to look at the common themes of political and administrative organisation of London, Paris and Berlin from 1920 to 2000. Although it seems to be difficult to compare the three cities in the past related to questions of (de-)centralisation, efficiency of administration and relationship with a central government, they have a common series of problems at this moment, which can be summarised as follows: "Is there a metropolitan community?" In particular the problem of a large group of immigrants within the metropolitan population and the difference between the urban space and the administrative boundaries are important problems. In all three metropolitan cities the combination of a capital city and largest city of the country was an important factor. The central governments exercised influence on the urban administration, albeit it for different reasons and at different times.

Guy Burgel pointed in his contribution about the urban development of Paris in the 20th century to the importance of the sub-urbs for the urban reality. During the development of the Parisian agglomeration the discrepancy between the spatial form and the administrative boundaries increased as a result of the process of sub-urbanisation. The slowing-down of the population growth during the 20th Century stopped the process of "metropolisation" of Paris. Instead of that, a series of smaller French cities developed as "regional metropolises". The process of de-centralisation, which started in the 1930-ties with a negative balance of migration, ended according to Burgel in the 1990-ties with a new centralisation. Following a process of increasing economic concentration as a result from a process of de-industrialisation and tertiarisation. Together with these processes one sees a decline of the labour class and the formation of a new middle class. The social segregation between the western and eastern parts of Paris following the expansion of the city in the direction of the west since Louis XIV (Versailles) went together with a process of ethnic segregation of the suburbs, in particular in the northern *banlieu*. The lack of power of an urban administration opposed to the central government could be showed e.g. on the basis of the traffic planning of the Parisian region in which it seems to be impossible to cope with the needs of polycentric development and the demand for direct links between the different suburbs. It is questionable if the historical change of government in the Paris govern-



ment in 2001 will make an end to the policy of mono-centrality, economic stagnation and a lack of influence of the urban government.

In his final contribution Peter Clark tried to put the future of the European metropolis in a broader historical perspective. If one takes Saskia Sassen's thesis as a point of departure, in which globalisation leads to a reinforcement of existing hierarchies, it is possible to make a comparison with the colonial cities in early modern times. It is not true that all European metropolises could be seen as the victors in their historical development. However, it is necessary to look at the losers under the large cities and at the slower ones. The demand for an alternative rank order is needed, because it can change our view of the European urban network. In particular it is a pity that it was not possible to have more attention for the Middle European cities as Warsaw, Prague and Budapest during this conference. However, the presentations of some Scandinavian countries showed it must be possible to expect a brighter future for some of the minor European metropolises.

In the final discussion it was stressed that the study of the metropolis not only demands for quantitative, but also qualitative aspects. The study of the European metropolis at the end of the twentieth century must be done from a worldwide perspective. But the effects of the decline of industry and the coming of a 'post-industrial society' are important themes too. They influenced population growth and new forms of social segregation. However, a specific problem seems to be the difficulty to find statistical source material on the level of agglomerations. One of the wishes for future research is the making of a database of materials, which will be as comparable as possible.

Programme

December 12th.

- 10.00 Hartmut Kaelble, *Welcome on behalf of the Centre for Comparative European History.*
- 11.00 Henk van Dijk, *The European Metropolis 1920-2000. Introduction*
- 12.00 Lunch
- 14.00 Bert van der Knaap/Ronald Wall, *Linking scales and urban network development.*
- 15.00 Jim Bater, *Market reforms and the Central City: St Petersburg and Moscow*
- 16.00 Richard Rodger, *Metropolis revisited.*
- 17.00 Heinz Reif, *Dynamics of Suburbanisation - The growing Periphery of the Metropolis. Berlin 1890-2000*
- 19.30 Dinner

December 13th.

- 9.00 Lars Nilsson, *New forms of metropolitan developments: Stockholm in the 20th century*
- 10.00 Paul van de Laar and Pim Kooij, *The floating metropolis. The Randstad moving north in the Dutch delta.*
- 11.00 Marjatta Hietala, *Key factors behind the innovativeness of Helsinki*
- 12.00 Lunch
- 14.00 Magda Pinheiro Lisbon: *From nineteenth century capital city to the metropolitan area*



16.00 Martin Kraaijestein, *The structure of local government in metropolitan areas: a continuing debate on problems and solutions.*

19.30 Dinner

December 14th.

9.00 Guy Burgel, *Paris, the evolution of the French metropolis in the twentieth century*

10.00 Peter Clark, *The Future of the European Metropolis.*

11.00 A proposal for a research project.

12.00 Lunch

14.00 Excursion

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NOTES

¹ Anthony Sutcliffe (ed.), *Metropolis 1890-1940* (London, 1984).

² Here we only can refer to the most prominent publications on this topic: Manuel Castells, *The rise of the network society* (Oxford ; Malden, Mass., 2000²); Saskia Sassen, *Cities in a world economy, Sociology for a new century* (Thousand Oaks, Calif, 1994); Saskia Sassen, *The global city : New York, London, Tokyo*, (Princeton, 2001²). Pages, Saskia Sassen and Institute of Advanced Studies., *Global networks, linked cities* (New York ; London, 2002).

³ See also: M Bell and M. Hietala, *Helsinki. The innovative city*. (Jyväskylä, 2002).