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Global Metropolises and Human Scale Development

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Abstract

The intention of this article is to link the thinking, research and action in the fields that deals with globalized urbanization, economy or governance with the area of human scale development. Put differently, to connect the development of the territory and especially of cities to the needs of people. Although there is rather wide discussion, research and agencies in place that deal with global problems, namely: unsustainability of present model of economic development, depletion of resources, extinction of species, destruction of natural ecosystems or exploitation of people, the economic growth is even in the midst of economic crisis the leading mantra and it seems that the gap between the needs of people and 'needs' of the political and economic system have never been wider.

The first part sketch the picture of the modern urbanizing world at the turn of the second millenium: a world that is globally interconnected via the network of global metropolises that are responsible for the ever growing ecological footprint of the modern civilization. Second part introduces the concept of fundamental human needs and human scale development – which is seen as a possible and practical way out of the modern crisis. Fundamental human needs are seen as a useful concept: (a) democratic tool for diagnosis of wider a more complex problems, (b) for a specification of most pressing issues or collective goals and (c) for an assessment of realized solutions.

Network of global metropolises

Global metropolises – regional nodes within world city network – are the key contemporary materializations of the process of modernity [1, 2, 3]. Understanding to these metropolises, to the process of their construction and to the city-society relation in general is felt essential for overcoming the many environmental, social and political issues that are looming in front of us in near future.

Generally speaking, the centuries-long process of the growth of modern civilization that is associated with the exponential growth of population, economy, productivity and urbanization reaches limits that cannot be overcome without fundamental change in our conception of society and its relation to the Earth that is materialised in cities we inhabit and whose existence and functioning we sustain.

The term *global metropolis* encompass three other terms: Sassen's *global city* [4], Castells' *metropolitan region* [5] and *megalopolis* (big city, UN use this term for cities over 10 millions inhabitants, but also due to the problem of the delimitation, we do not stick to any specific population value). Global metropolises usually sit at the top of the urban system, that consist of many more cities, towns and villages. In smaller and medium sized states, it is usually the

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capital city. In bigger states and unions of states, global metropolises are formed around such cities that mediate the connection to the global economy and the rest of the world in general. World city network [6] is densely interconnected (by roads, rails, airports, telecommunications – that all serves for establishment and mediation of social relations over distance). Global metropolises are in a way much closer to each other than to rest of the urban system. Network of global metropolises is *the network* which facilitates global communication between people, production of goods in global assembly lines, distribution of various resources and goods, conduction of global politics, science and culture.

Functioning of global metropolises and of systems that caters for the daily needs of their inhabitants rest on multiple and far-reaching networks of production, distribution and consumption. Global metropolises are vast spaces that serves the satisfaction of all imaginable human needs and wants. Significant part of this satisfaction is provided by consumption – of goods that are usually produced elsewhere.

Human scale development

But as Manfred Max-Neef shows [7], consumption of goods is capable of satisfaction of only some needs. He stress, that when some of the *fundamental* human needs are not satisfied, people live in poverty. And Max-Neef's concept of poverty goes beyond the restricted economic view. He actually speaks of poverties, because when some of those fundamental human needs are not adequately satisfied, it reveals a human poverty. And poverty generates pathologies.

Max-Neef [7] formulates three postulates:

- 1) Development is about people and not about objects. This is the basic postulate of Human Scale Development.
- 2) Fundamental human needs are finite, few and classifiable.
- 3) Fundamental human needs (such as those contained in the system proposed) are the same in all cultures and in all historical periods. What changes, both over time and through cultures, is the way or the means by which the needs are satisfied.

And after he think through these postulates and its consequences, he spells some conclusions:

- 1) Any fundamental human need not adequately satisfied generates a pathology.
- 2) Up to the present we have developed treatments for individual and small group pathologies.
- 3) Today, we are faced with a dramatic increase in collective pathologies for which treatments have proved unadequate.
- 4) The understanding of these collective pathologies requires transdisciplinary research and action.

To illustrate his approach, let's quote Max-Neef [7, p. 23]: “There is no sense in healing an individual who is then expected to go back and live in a sick environment. Every discipline, in becoming increasingly reductionist and technocratic, has given way to a process of dehumanization. To humanize ourselves again from within our own disciplines is the great challenge.”

That is the reason for starting our endeavours with a systematization of fundamental human needs: they are classified to 9 axiological categories (Subsistence, Protection, Affection, Understanding, Participation, Idleness, Creation, Identity and Freedom) and 4 existential categories (Being, Having, Doing and Interacting) which are summed in a matrix (with 36 cells) of needs and satisfiers. There are examples of satisfiers in the cells of the matrix and satisfiers are later, for analytical purposes, divided into 5 types: (a) violators or destroyers, (b)

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pseudo-satisfiers, (c) inhibiting satisfiers, (d) singular satisfiers and (e) synergic satisfiers. This schema is intended to be used for the purposes of diagnosis, planning, assessment and evaluation of the deprivations and potentials of the groups, located within a local space – it is therefore a tool for human scale development. And it was used as such not only at the level of local groups, towns and region but also on the level of states (there are examples of Colombia, Bolivia, Great Britain and Sweden).

We are not going to dig deeper into these concepts, the reference [7] will suffice. But we are going to discuss the relevance of the concept of human scale development to the emergence of the network of global metropolises and associated issues.

Discussion

The crucial problem is spelled out in the first Max-Neef's proposition: *development* is about *people* and not about *objects*. And if we claim to live in democratic society, the development must primarily address all the people, not the nations, social or ethnic groups and not the economy. It is the basic distinction, between means (economy, social or political structure) and ends (development of human potentials), that is being inverted – and that lies at the root of many contemporary problems.

These are not technical issues and not even primarily scientific questions (due to the peculiar and suspicious character of all social experiments). If we deal with people and society, the normative questions needs to be addressed first (What are our basic assumptions about people, society, its current and desired structure? If we talk about development, what is the society that we are going to construct?) and economy is in this respect part of the society.

Another crucial question tackles the scale and structure of presented issues. Human scale development is explicitly bottom-up approach, while the network of global metropolises was constructed by a strong top-down approach. If we agree with the thesis that modernity is being materialized in spatial structure of the territory [2,3], network of global metropolises seems to be reinforcing (materializing, cementing, embodying) the top-down approach. The sceptics may conclude that human scale development is useful at best only as a tool for a mitigation of negative side-effects of modernity. The optimists may, on the other hand, see in the network of global metropolises a potential for a conduct of a world-scale democracy and human scale development may be a useful way for achieving this goal. We don't claim either but take the fundamental human needs as a useful concept: (a) democratic tool for diagnosis of wider social problems, (b) for a specification of most pressing issues or collective goals and (c) for an assessment of realized solutions.

The focus on fundamental human needs takes seriously the famous quote from Brundtland Report: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." It systematically describes the needs, common to all people, but do not prescribe the means of their satisfaction – how to satisfy those needs depends a lot on a social, natural or historical context and also on available resources. Human scale development therefore do not offer (or dictate) solutions but raise the fundamental issues and shows a way of tackling them. It strives to *engage* people – not made them objects of development. It challenges the Maslow's hierarchy of needs (which has been criticized from various positions) – a concept, on which was based approach to the 'development' since the introduction of this policy after WW2. The negative effects of the application of Maslow's hierarchy can be seen for instance in neoliberal approaches and their strong focus on economy, on needs at the bottom of Maslow's pyramid and political neglect of the rest of the needs – that are claimed to belong only to the personal sphere.

Czech Technical University in Prague

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Conclusion

Fundamental human needs are seen as a concept that enables to take the issues of development (of land, cities, networks etc.) out of the hands of experts and take it back to the people that are directly affected by such development. It is seen as useful and democratic tool for identification, planning and assessment of solutions of the real and serious problems.

It has proved useful especially in local and regional contexts, but it was applied also in several national contexts – and it is therefore recommended to use it also in Czech Republic. The approach of human scale development emerged as a reaction (and alternative) to unsustainable results of mainstream development programs – part of which was construction of the network of global metropolises. And if we currently experience a manifold crisis, induced by the mainstream social and economical models, ways of thinking and dealing with problems, it is useful to tackle the crisis from the ground, rethink our basic assumptions and it is good to start with fundamental human needs.

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