

Cities in Transition: Editorial Introduction

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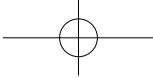
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We witness nowadays the emergence of the ‘*New Urban World*’, in which increasing urbanization will be a robust structural trend. And most likely, many large cities and urban agglomerations will become nodes of global development. The current geographic landscape of our world exhibits a ‘double urbanization’ phenomenon: medium-size cities turn into large cities, and large cities turn into megacities (or polynuclear agglomerations). The ‘urban way of life’ will most likely be the dominant lifestyle in this century. In association with ICT developments, cities will increasingly witness a global lifestyle governed by virtual interaction, differential evolution, and complex learning mechanisms. It is noteworthy that population development and growth are becoming largely an urban phenomenon in this ‘*New Urban World*’. Urban sustainability in terms of ecology, social dynamics, and vulnerability of cities and urban agglomeration calls for a careful urban management and strategy development.

What is the socio-economic explanation for the miracle of persistent urbanization in the ‘*New Urban World*’? In general, cities are able to produce positive externalities in the form of proximity advantages (various production and consumption agglomeration benefits that accrue from economies of scale, localization and urbanization). Consequently, cities are able to generate productivity rises, entrepreneurial ‘animal spirits’, creativity and innovations, and knowledge results. Clearly, cities may exhibit different rising and declining fortunes over time, but the overall urban trend is one of structural growth. It should be added that the evolutionary dynamics

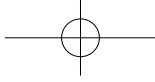


of urban systems in our world cannot be separated from demographic trends, in particular ageing and migration. Finally, urban areas are often central hubs of new knowledge and innovation. But the exploitation of this strategic position of cities presupposes functional specialization, with a clear diversification over regional, national and global scales. A further understanding of this phenomenon calls for due insight into the working of urban land use, labour markets, housing markets, knowledge centres and urban entrepreneurship. In this context, the role of both large and small firms is of the utmost importance, as these firms are central in (international) trade in goods and services. They position the city through their gateway function in the centre of networks and (global) competition.

Agglomeration benefits are partly economic in nature, but also partly social, cultural or technological. To exploit such benefits, innovative urban development patterns are necessary to lay the future foundations for renewed cities that are sustainable, inclusive and competitive. This new perspective on the future of our planet is nowadays called the '*The New Urban World*'. Four broad, interconnected future challenges for urban development can be identified that hold for cities in both the developed and the developing world. These challenges concern:

- The quality of life in cities, in the context of environmental sustainability concerns and long-range climate change;
- Social cohesion and equity in cities to cope with future risks of social tensions and to ensure a harmonious living-together in renovated areas with a broad social mix;
- The economic competitiveness of cities as a source of new opportunities and socio-economic vitality in a global economy;
- Land-use planning in urban areas – often with higher densities – may help to cope with urban sprawl and slums, while ensuring the availability and effectiveness of infrastructure, public transport and public amenities.

The urban agglomerations may continue to be melting pots of people (cultural diversity) from all over the world, who may bring their creative minds to full fruition in the city. And the city may then become a 'supernova' surrounded by many creative and innovative satellites and networks. Moreover, new urban constellations may be less determined by administrative borders, but more by spatially-cohesive functionalities driven by self-organizing principles. Urban size may no longer be just an issue in itself: it all depends on the smart combination of entrepreneurial, creative, social, human, and economic capital. Yet, the world development of urban agglomerations – including megacities – will be diversified and fluctuating. They may exhibit the normal dynamic pattern of industrial life, with ups and downs, but with a long-run tendency to increase welfare. In conclusion, the urban mode of living and working calls for an operational framework that is able to encapsulate the motives and behaviour of their citizens and firms, based on solid empirical data.



by means of larger font sizes in a hierarchical way. It turns out that concepts like innovation, agglomeration benefits, population dynamics, business innovation, and creative sectors are key words in the various articles in this spatial issue. Such concepts have always been critical in the emergence and continuity of urban areas, and are apparently still key to a proper understanding of urban dynamics and urban futures. They also provide the logical anchor points for strategic urban management.