



Получена: 18.03.2017 г.

Приета: 22.04.2017 г.

THE CITY OF TOMORROW

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Keywords: architecture, urban development, social inequality

ABSTRACT

According to Aristotle the largest city should not exceed 5000 people. This statement sounds quite odd, considering the size of the modern cosmopolitan cities. In 2050 almost 7 billion people will be living in cities, and this is a number which is difficult to imagine, as well as what consequences, problems and questions it will bring in the future. At the beginning of XX century, in the year 1900, the entire population of the world was 1 billion and 500 million people, and the city population in its entirety was about 200 million people. Or, in other words, for 150 years, which is an extremely short period in human history, the population on earth has increased five times, and the urban population 30 times. This simple statistics gives us a reason to reflect upon what the city of tomorrow would possibly look like, what would be the new requirements towards it, and also what would be the new definition for a populated area, so that it would be labeled as a “city”.

From the point of view of economics, more and more economic activities will be concentrated in the city of tomorrow, as it will contain the largest markets for all goods and services which are being produced. The cities nowadays are in the center of what we call globalization of economy. There are concentrated all activities related to the production of added value, goods and services, necessary for satisfying the ever growing needs of people. According to architect Ina Lambeva “in the role of users we internalize more than we realize”. Also, the biggest innovation centers in technology are located within the city. This fact determines the strong link between the urban and economic development.

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Along with the urban development, from an economic perspective, the question of social development of tomorrow's city and the quality of life which will be offered by fastest growing metropolises become a topic along with the urban development.

The fact is that large cities in many countries provide an environment of contrasts. The most contrasting division between rich and poor can be seen particularly in the cities. On the one hand we see gated communities for more affluent residents isolated in terms of number of inhabitants and isolating themselves in terms of social criteria, placing barriers behind which the benefits are only for the “God chosen ones”. On the other hand, the increasing expansion of the so-called shanty towns can also be observed. From the point of view of a better life, we are used to seeing housing for the poor as something that does not affect us directly, but it will increasingly grow as a factor and will expand its meaning. At present, we see this mainly in Asia, Africa and Latin America, but in reality it is present in many cities in Europe as a symbol of poverty, albeit in much smaller scale. In Europe the problems are different; actually the demographic increase is negative, as this continent is becoming depopulated. Europe is facing the question whether to increase drastically its population or to control the pressure from outside.

Are we prepared for these cities of tomorrow in which the population will have increased to an extent which is difficult to imagine at present? Are we prepared to face problems such as poverty, illiteracy and consuming, which will become more and more pertinent?



Fig. 1. Part of the growing urban environment in the gypsy ghetto in Plovdiv, Bulgaria

For the development of the city environment in 19th century, the most sensitive issues were considered the anarchic and unreigned growing of the ghettos, filled with poverty and misery. We can say that even paradoxically the city is simultaneously a space where most of the goods are produced, where there is prosperity and accumulation of wealth and it also is the place where most of the poverty is concentrated. Mike Davis wrote in his book “Planet of slums”, that more than one billion people live in shanty towns, in extremely poor neighborhoods. It is considered that in 2050 over 2 billion people will be living in shanty towns. Apart from this, we have to acknowledge to what extent the city of today is influenced by the most dangerous for the whole humanity phenomena – the global change in the climatic conditions. This is a process which is characterized not only by the global warming, but also with the loss of biological diversity, and water, soil, and air pollution. The city of today is very directly influenced by the problems with the climatic changes and will turn into an even more vulnerable place.



Fig. 2. An example of air pollution over Bulgaria

Along with the development of science, economy and technology we must pay attention to the depletion of resources, necessary for the sustaining of life.

What would the city of the future look like and will not cities become a string of gated residential structures amidst one huge shanty town? Peculiar nuclei of residence behind barriers and boundaries, of clear segregation between rich and poor? What will become of common urban spaces and will they exist at all or will act as a kind of road crossings between the separate gated communities? These suppositions are only provocation to make us think to what extent we are prepared for the challenges of the New city. According to Jacque Fresco, while discussing the future of Earth, “if we don’t live in accordance with Earth’s nature and if we don’t live in accordance with nature resources, we wouldn’t be able to live at all. You cannot announce a population of 10 billion people without having made a research about the resources you have to take care of it. After having made research that you have enough resources to feed these people, if you exceed these limits, you will cause hunger, malnutrition, territorial arguments. If you maintain the population in a healthy proportion with the feeding capacity of Earth, there won’t be any problems”. This thesis also brings to light other questions, the main one being how much is enough in order to have people fed and is their being fed just enough?

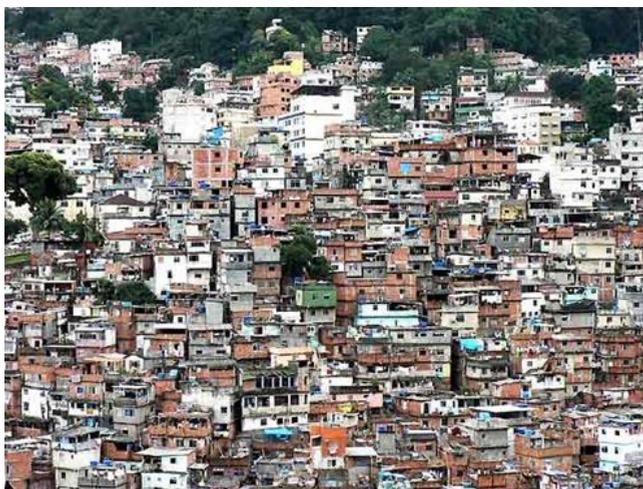


Fig. 3. Part of growing urban development in Rio de Janeiro

It is difficult to cover all the challenges that face the cities of the future. On the one hand, there is the uncontrollable population among the people from the lower social layers, on the other there is the lack of realistic idea for the natural resources we have, and thirdly we have to take into account the climatic changes and the natural disasters. Nowadays, we are in a bit of paradox situation. In reality, the city may be considered as a place where the greatest power is concentrated, where the biggest number of people live, and where the most up-to-date technologies, the largest infrastructure services, as well as the flexibility and mobility are concentrated. And the paradox – we have the feeling that the city is more and more threatened, more vulnerable and more sensitive to the problems, related to the social inequality and extreme poverty, which raises a lot of questions in front of the decision making authority.



Fig. 4, 5. Floods in the city of Mizia, Bulgaria

The city is also vulnerable in terms of economic crises, the results of which provide the greatest impact in large settlements. Of course, we should not forget the problems that urban habitation is facing along with the major natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and fires. Actually the question that has to be answered is what will be a tomorrow city like in the context of vulnerability of urban space. Can we find solutions, so that the city would become less vulnerable from social, political and environmental point of view? Among other things, we must not forget that cities today are a place of multiple political crises and as a result the most important condition for people's lives – their security, is threatened. Many authors suggest that the rate of urbanization in recent decades is so high that the concept of city begins to lose its meaning. Urban spaces gain unlimited size and it can no longer be identified where they begin and where they end. Take as an example Los Angeles, this city without limits, where you enter and leave almost without noticing. The same goes for the major Chinese, African and Indian cities. These regions of urbanization are so great that we might have to stop calling them cities and find a better word, a concept that describes a diffused place. In search of urban solutions we cannot rely solely on history because the historical city no longer exists. We need to understand the modern urbanization in order to try then to find the best resources and tools available that will allow us to arrange a better city. In contrast to Aristotle, however, who believes that the largest city should number 5,000 people, cities of the future have no limits. We have seen an incredible change – city-symbols such as New York, London and Paris are acquiring a different role than until now. The planned, controlled and arranged urban areas in global scale are few compared to urbanization which is out of control. China included, urbanization is not subject to planning, it is rather a spontaneous process.

The issue for the city of the future, the development and redevelopment of its urban space so that it can contain as many people as possible and be as democratically developed as possible, is to a great extent a political issue as well. This is a question that political power

faces, regardless of the fact whether it is public, national or local government. This is only possible if we are able to diagnose problems, to apply adequate solutions and provide funding in order not to fall in the pattern of corruption and contribute to the actual development of the future city. Bearing in mind that people are not born taught to certain behavior, but rather reflect their cultural environment, it is important to remember that development is an endless process and the most important is the direction we point them to.

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УТРЕШНИЯТ ГРАД

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Ключови думи: архитектура, градоустройство, социално неравенство

РЕЗЮМЕ

Според Аристотел най-големият град трябва да наброява 5000 души. Това твърдение звучи меко казано странно на фона на днешните космополитни градове. През 2050 г. близо 7 милиарда души ще живеят в градовете, а това е количество, за което трудно можем да си представим какви последствия ще донесе и какви въпроси и проблеми ще постави в бъдеще. В началото на XX век, през 1900 г., цялото население на света е достигало 1 млрд. и 500 млн. души, а градското население в своята цялост е било 200 млн. души. Тоест за 150 години, което е изключително кратък период в човешката история, населението на Земята се е умножило пет пъти, а градското население трийсет пъти. Тази елементарна статистика ни дава повод за размисъл: как би изглеждал градът на бъдещето, какви ще са новите изисквания към него, каква ще е новата дефиниция, обуславяща дадено населено място, за да бъде наречено то „град“?

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