ZAK | Centre for Cultural and General Studies

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19th Karlsruhe Dialogues 2015
Global DemocraCITIES: Between Triumph and Decline

Opening Address on Friday, 27 February 2015
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– original speech held in German; check against delivery –

Introduction

Prof. Dr. Saskia Sassen has recently reminded us of the following: "History teaches us that nothing is truly permanent – nothing except cities. They have survived everything: the fall of empires and kingdoms, revolutions, governments, and the collapse of banks." Nothing is closer to us than the city, and the statistics support this claim: according to the UN study *World Urbanization Prospects 2014*, 54 per cent of the world's population are now living in urban areas. That figure was only 30 per cent in 1950. Clear-cut modernisation and development contexts can be demonstrated on the regional level: in North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean, over 80 per cent of people are now living in urban centres; in Europe, some 73 per cent. Parts of Africa and Asia are still predominantly rural. 40 and 48 per cent of their respective populations are living in cities, which are growing rapidly. The largest rural populations are in India and China, two countries where, along with Nigeria, the world's highest population growth is projected in the coming years. According to an estimate by the World Bank, it is expected that China alone will witness an additional 300 million people moving to cities in the next 15 years – a development that will further increase the pressure on cities.

Allow me to also present a few figures pertaining to megacities, which are hardly conceivable for us here in our cosy town of Karlsruhe. Despite its aging population, Tokyo remains the world's largest city with 38 million people, followed by Delhi with 25 million, Shanghai with 23, and Mexico City, Mumbai, and São Paulo, each with some 21 million inhabitants. By 2030, it is projected that there will be some 41 cities with more than 10 million inhabitants. The entire population of my homeland of Scotland could fit into the Greater Tokyo Area more than seven times over, and all of Baden-Württemberg could fit into it more than three times over.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope that these latest figures will direct your attention to the initial quantitative conditions that we are dealing with as we take a closer look at our topic "Global DemocraCITIES: Between Triumph and Decline". From a qualitative perspective, we need to ask ourselves which systemically relevant issues, in particular those pertaining to democracy, arise here. Our foregrounding of the theme of the "city" this year has to do, on the one hand, with the aforementioned 300th anniversary of Karlsruhe, and on the other hand with the fact that it is a necessary and logical continuation of our themes from the past few years: the dynamics of all those topics continue to challenge us; and all those topics have direct impacts on the development of cities. The reverse is also the case: the success or failure of urban development influences world events from climate change to refugee and migration movements.

In 2011, we took up the topic of Google Cultures and the power of the Internet. The technology that enables us to develop social media is simultaneously a prerequisite for a globally networked civil society. And we know that social media are primarily used for communication at the local level.

In 2012, the new obscurities in a globalised world were the focus of discussion, in particular with regard to the directly associated problems of decision-making and the increasing de facto undermining of classical parliamentary sovereignty at the national level.

In 2013, we examined the "In-Between Society" in which the contradictions between tradition and modernism have become increasingly visible and potentially more conflict-ridden in the globalised spaces of certain cities, including our own. We should note the following: in many cities, processes of integrating and segregating the residents with regard to living conditions, income level, ethnicity, and religion present massive challenges. On the one hand, the number of private gated communities is increasing across the globe – whether out of fear of crime or, with residents of high social status, out of the desire to "remain among themselves". On the other hand, we should also mention "parallel societies", which are – whether willingly or unwillingly – spatially, socially, and culturally isolated from the prevailing majority society. Neither of these aspects is helpful for an open, democratic, and socially integrated urban community; instead, they reinforce social and cultural separation.

The cohesion of cities is unfortunately often threatened by this double problem. And in the face of the trend toward growing radicalisation across the globe, the following questions (among others) come more prominently into focus: Is the vision of "unity in diversity" still a utopian one, or can we assume a gradual realisation of diversity as a global norm? And how can differing ways of life and lifestyles be reconciled within a rapidly changing society? Unity is an ongoing project that must constantly be redeveloped. An active civil society and active and responsible local politics and administration need to repeatedly strengthen urban identities and create positive frameworks for cohesion within urban communities.

Finally, in last year's Karlsruhe Dialogues on the topic of "World (Market) Society: On Trade with Goods, Data and Humans", we asked ourselves under which conditions we could approve of the dissolution of national borders surrounding the flow of money, goods, and data, which has led to the emergence of a global market. In his opening speech for those Karlsruhe Dialogues on the topic of "Policy of World Society: Is the Global Dynamic Politically Accessible?", the former judge of the Federal Constitutional Court Prof. Dr. Dr. Udo Di Fabio presented, with reference to the work of Immanuel Kant, his ideal of a "federal world republic of segmented democracies that increasingly cooperate with one another and agree on general rules for other systems of society".

All of these topics from past Karlsruhe Dialogues are still very relevant to the dynamic development of our cities. Many metropolises are far from the ideal of a city, which entails knowing how to master the challenges of global modernity. They are increasingly responsible for developing in environmentally, culturally, and socially balanced ways.

On the one hand, modern science-based urban planning is more important than ever. Emerging environmental problems as well as issues related to energy supply, mobility, educational infrastructure, waste disposal, and the management of resources represent enormous challenges. The housing problem in rapidly growing regions of the world often leads to informal housing situations that are difficult to manage and control, such as the favelas in Brazil and Nigeria. In this context, Acatech, the German National Academy of Science and Engineering, notes that emerging and developing nations are encountering increasing difficulties in coping with the global trend toward urbanisation. In some regions of the world, attempts have therefore been made to cope with rapid population growth by means of planned cities that architects conceive on drawing boards. But this leads to other problems. The ancient Chinese cities, for example, have all but disappeared; cultural heritage is not being protected. We will use the example of London when tackling this issue and the possibilities for stronger citizen participation.

Allow me to end with a few words on the subject of "democracy". Keywords such as "political apathy" and "crisis of democracy" remind us that democracy is a difficult business, and full of paradoxes. Even in Europe, we have very different forms of parliamentary democracy, as well as old and new separatist movements (such as in Catalonia and Scotland), dissatisfaction with the EU (in particular on the part of the smaller countries), and much more. David Cameron is responding with a plan for decentralisation of powers to large metropolitan areas, which has support across party lines. He has linked his proposal to the expectation of revitalising cities and making them more attractive. In many large cities across the globe, for example in Toronto, civil participation is a standard aspect of urban development projects. Tobias Voss, a director of the Frankfurt Book Fair, recently noted, with regard to the development of European cities in the Middle Ages, that "urban development generally followed localised and collective wisdom". Joint projects bring people together. Nevertheless, we also know that the opposite can occur with major projects. For example, Stuttgart 21, which – for our international guests, who might not have heard of it – was a massive development project to reconstruct the Stuttgart train station, deeply divided the city, and even created rifts within families.

In her 2011 publication *Disillusion with Democracy*, Prof. Dr. Janice E. Perlman makes reference to a UN study. 19,000 people in 18 Latin American countries were surveyed. A majority said that they would rather support a dictator than an elected representative, if the former ensured greater prosperity – and while this is not a welcome attitude, it is an understandable one. The 57 million refugees worldwide – the largest figure since the Second World War – are primarily concerned about survival. In many countries, they are being forced to experience how potentially responsible policies are failing them miserably at all levels, and how refuge and asylum are their only remaining options.

But where danger grows, there too grows the potential for deliverance. More and more cities are joining forces in the face of increasing problems and challenges in order to come up with solutions and share best-practice models. Examples of this include: the C40 global urban network (C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group), whose participating metropolises are addressing the problem of global climate change; the GNSC (Global Network on Safer Cities) initiative, which was founded in 2012 by UN-Habitat; and also the umbrella organisation UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments), which represents the interests of cities and local municipalities in international politics. We are asking the following: Can such networks advance to the level of a new global governance paradigm, as the political scientist Prof. Dr. Benjamin R. Barber suggests with reference to a "Global Parliament of Mayors"? And what is the role of both urban and international NGOs that are actively and professionally taking part in problem solving within a growing global civil society?

We will be discussing these questions here, and particularly on Sunday with two "grandes dames" of the political world, namely Dr. h.c. Petra Roth, former mayor of Frankfurt am Main, and Catherine Trautmann, former Member of the European Parliament and the French government, and former mayor of Strasbourg.

I would like to say a final word of thanks. Ladies and gentlemen, the Karlsruhe Dialogues could not take place without the commitment and support not only of those already mentioned, but also of many other people and institutions.