



## ISTANBUL WITHIN A EUROPE OF CITIES

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It is often said that a Europe of cities has emerged in the last generation, cities whose ties to each other weaken the bonds of each city to its own nation state. This proposition is both true and untrue. Just to make the matter more complicated, new membership in the European Union, as in Poland and Hungary, did integrate cities like Warsaw and Budapest into the network of European cities; economic and political integration, however, also stimulated social and cultural withdrawal from Europe.

The background to a Europe of cities lies in how most European cities dealt with the huge damage done in World War II. Recovery meant, largely, restoring the central-city fabric that existed before. New buildings filled in an old grain, one usually established before the Industrial Revolution, which meant in turn that the periphery of cities became the key site for new forces, the thinly populated or un-built periphery the receptor for new immigrants, new forms of industrial production and offices. Profound consequences followed: the human settlements on the periphery became isolated from, and invisible to, those who lived in the centre, while the economic activities at the edge followed a different path from economic renewal in the centre. The seats of national power were restored, following an old European pattern, to the compact city centre – a matter of re-linking centralised power to the fortunes of the urban centre.

This path of restoration in London, Manchester, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Warsaw, and Milan contrasted with the post-War decades in American cities, whose middle-classes abandoned the central city; again, in a different way, to São Paulo and Johannesburg, places which in the growth years that began half a century ago, developed patchwork enclaves of race and class, cities which became archipelagos of poverty and wealth.

The Urban Age conference in New York addressed the hollowing out of the central city. William H. Whyte first plotted the movement of executive jobs from the city streets to isolated corporate campuses in the 1960s and 1970s, and he explored the worrying tendency of such companies to implode shortly afterwards. Ex-urban locations, he suggested, had the effect of isolating corporations from the face-to-face economy of the city, and thus further weakened companies that were already vulnerable. In Johannesburg, the work of the Urban Age found an equal hollowing out of its urban core. Here the driver was exclusively racial; the economics of large-versus-small business playing a weak role.

These very different ways of evacuating the centre contrast with the European city in the last half century. Rebuilding the distinction between centre and edge, privileging again the centres, marked Europe's path of urban growth. The image of a 'Europe of cities' concerns the networking of those centres, not of the cities as a whole. Movements of populations from one periphery to another are quite rare: few Turkish families pushed to the edge of Frankfurt are prompted to make a beach-head migration to the edge of London, and there is little movement between the peripheries of London and Paris. All the same time the centres grow ever more tightly bound: the financial trade routes between the City of London and Frankfurt are stronger than, and largely divorced from, the financial activity each city does with its own nation. Similarly, the trade route of foreign tourism – a principle source of central-city wealth – is marked by a fixed London-Paris-Rome path rather than by dispersal from the monumental urban centre into the rest of the nation.

These are familiar facts which, however, many working for the European Union hoped to alter. In the 1990s, Brussels' officials in both the labour sector

and in urban planning wanted cities in new member states, particularly Poland and Hungary, to break the post-War pattern of Western European growth. Through investment policy and the application of a common labour law, Brussels sought to create more internally cohesive cities, less segregated from and more integrated with smaller towns in the same nations. This has not occurred, at least not in financial services, high-tech, and creative industries – the drivers of the new economy; more integrated into Europe, Warsaw and Budapest are increasingly withdrawn from their nation-states.

Many would argue that global capitalism is the source of centralisation and withdrawal, that this pattern of urban growth can be seen also in Mumbai, Tel Aviv, or São Paulo, that it is not distinctively European. At the Urban Age conference in São Paulo, Saskia Sassen argued that the rebuilding of central areas in cities, whether downtown or at the edges, is part of their new, global economic role. Rebuilding key parts of these cities as platforms for a rapidly growing range of global activities and flows, from economic to cultural and political also explains why architecture, urban design and urban planning have all become more important and visible in the last two decades. And more standardised. Related to this sweeping economic change is the fact that modern urban development has homogenised building forms, the poured-concrete and glass box becoming ubiquitous.

One reason standardisation has progressed lies in the fact that such buildings can be globally traded: like money, they are equally the same in all places. The social consequences of standardisation can also be taken to be global rather than European: homogeneity in built form abets segregation – that is, it becomes much quicker and easier to erect entire communities destined for particular social groups, to sort people out, than if planning has to adapt to the quirks and complexities of local buildings. This marriage of homogenisation and segregation is an issue Urban Age addressed in Mumbai. If true, then the prospect for Istanbul as a city in the European Union would mean that the machinery of the Union – its codes of labour and building practice, its banking rules on investment, its assertion of citizen-rights of free movement – abet the process of inclusion in a capitalist rather than a European order. ‘Europe’ lays down just a marker of how this larger inclusion will

occur through accentuating the distinction between centre and periphery.

But that distinction matters in large measure because it is not static. Exclusion is not a fact that people accept passively. Much of the dirty work of rebuilding and maintaining European cities was done by immigrant labour; immigrants worked on building sites, cleaned the streets, staffed hotels and hospitals. Now, in the second and third generation of these immigrant families, continued existence as peripheral peoples is no longer acceptable. Nor has the concentration/withdrawal occurring in the centres of cities become naturalised as a fact of life among ‘native’ Europeans. The resurgence of cultural nationalism in the last decade signals in part a refusal of people outside the centre to be side-lined, their invisibility taken for granted, the local seen as mere decor. The centre/periphery distinction generates profound social dissonances. This is a large issue, one faced by any city like Istanbul entering a period of expansion.

The dissonances of centralisation appeared in places as diverse as Mexico City and Shanghai in our study of global cities. But a more focused version of this problem might appear in Istanbul because it is a ‘hinge city’, an urban form which has had a particular shape in Europe. Venice is the European prototype of the hinge city. Renaissance Venice was built on trade with very distant places, dealing in spices from India, slaves from what is now Morocco, cloth and rugs from the countries along the Asian Silk Road, and sending to the East goods finished in Europe. Filled with foreign traders, Venice sought to contain them through the most rigid residential segregation confining Jews to the three ghetto islands, Turks, Germans, and others to *fondaci*, gated communities in which people were checked out for the day and checked in at night. The *fondaci* failed as containing institutions: foreigners gradually installed themselves everywhere in the spaces of Venice.

What makes Venice the prototype of a hinge city is the impermanence in time of these foreigners inhabiting a cosmopolitan space. They seldom stayed more than a few years. And this has been largely true of hinge cities around the Mediterranean. We imagine that places like Izmir, Barcelona, or Casablanca are cities where different groups lived together generation after generation, but the statistical reality is that

the internal composition of each community shifted from generation to generation. The Mediterranean hinge city earned its reputation for mutual tolerance only because much of its population used the city as a transit camp, a site for deals and work, by peoples of an entrepreneurial bent who were willing to move whenever they sensed opportunity elsewhere. Mutual ethnic tolerance thus rested on a lack of permanent identification with local life. The hinge city is a city of migrants rather than immigrants, a place of location rather than a destination, a city of mobilities.

Constantinople had, during the era when Venice dominated the Mediterranean, something of this character as well. In the wake of historical research by Fernand Braudel and William H. MacNeil, we now understand better than an earlier generation – which viewed the Sultanate as a closed society – just how dynamic the movement of people as well as goods through Constantinople was along the eastern and southern rim of the Mediterranean, even as Europe sought from the sixteenth century onwards to seal the northern rim.

In function, the urban ‘hinge’ addresses a basic problem in most crossroads cities. This is that the strength of commercial activity attracts more in-migrants than the cities can provide with jobs or opportunities. Rather than rooting misery to one spot, the contacts and information flows which the hinge generates allow people to look and to travel elsewhere. In urbanistic terms, this means that public spaces for sociability acquire great importance: talk in the cafe or in the market is how people find work or opportunity.

It is sometimes thought that the advent of cyberspace communication will replace the physical public spaces of the classic hinge, but economically the case has not been proven. Face-to-face contacts and connections remain vital, because they generate personalised trust in what is being communicated, and such personalised trust is especially necessary for poor people to act on information. Without fat bank accounts or institutions to support them, the knowledge they have to act upon resides largely in how they assess the people who impart it.

If the ‘informal’ public realm is crucial for survival in the over-crowded, under-resourced crossroads city, a great planning tragedy is occurring today in cities around the Mediterranean. The hinges are, as it were, beginning to rust. Along the northern European rim, informal movement and informal labour are becoming criminalised. In my view, the European Union has wrongly conspired with rather than contested the nationalist impulse to make informality illegal. Along the eastern and southern rims of the Mediterranean, the hinge of mobility is rusting due to issues that more directly concern us as urbanists.

Much of the urban development occurring in Lebanon, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco is eliminating or weakening informal public space. In Beirut, for instance, post civil-war reconstruction has forced small-scale enterprises away from the seafront. In Alexandria, the renovation project around the library is replacing informal places usable by poor people with clean, controlled public space meant mostly for tourists. Some of this erasure and expulsion can be traced to economics, but basic issues of urban design are also involved in the weakening of the informal public realm. Informal public space requires under-determined urban planning, that is, an architecture which allows flexibility of use and admits physical gaps and indeterminate relationships between buildings. It is in these liminal spaces that informality can flourish – the cafe built into a parking lot or the market stall outside a loading dock. The virtue of informal public space in hinge cities requires us, in other words, to challenge ideas that emphasising spatial order and purpose in urban design, ideas realised in practice, produce an over-determined environment.

Whether this is also a danger in Istanbul is an issue I hope will be raised by the Urban Age. If it is a danger you are facing, we ought to explore what we, as policy-makers, planners, and architects can do to protect and promote informal public space. Both the challenges of centralisation and informalisation could be put as a question: does Istanbul in the future want to look more like modern Frankfurt or Renaissance Venice?

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