

## METROPOLISES AND MEGALOPOLISES. NEW GLOBAL ACTORS IN THE COMPLEX ORDER OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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**Abstract.** Within the present paper, we'll use the premise that the 21<sup>st</sup> century world will be marked progressively by the rising importance, by the proliferation and diversity of non-state actors, thus becoming, a complex order, where classical meanings of “sovereignty” or “state”, will be submitted to pressures and challenges derived from these actors. Among the global actors with transnational influence in establishing and deciding global issues, we consider to be, in the future, the great metropolitan areas (metropolises, megalopolises). Such actors might build their own modalities of political legitimacy, an autonomous way of working, apart from the state and they might progressively develop their own patterns of sovereignties, personal and independent budgets, and distinct forms of leadership in comparison with the state ones. We consider that, among the non-state global actors, such entities and their ascension in a post-sovereign world represented only in a small measure a serious, systematic object of study, despite the fact that their capacities, influence and localisation are defining them as entities with huge geopolitical and geo-economical potential, in influencing the development of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

**Keywords:** *global order, metropolis, non-state actors, multi-level governance.*

### *From the State-City to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Metropolis and the Megalopolis, as New Global Actors*

Ever since its beginnings, the city has been directly associated with the “state” concept, as state-cities such (as Eridu, Erech, Lagas, Ur, and Mari)<sup>1</sup> occurred in the area of ancient Mesopotamia, inaugurating the dynastic age, around the year 2800 B.C. The first dynasties in this area formed even empires with state-cities as nuclei, empires such as the Akkadian empire (2360-2230 B.C.), the Ur empire (2112-2004 B.C.), the empire of Hammurabi (1782-1750 B.C.).

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that, in the earliest Sumerian myths, “the metropolis is a gift made by the divinity to the humanity, urban civilization is seen as a celestial benefit”. Of course, we must not lose sight of the militarized,

Sumerian state-cities were theocratic cities, led by an “*ensi*” or priest-king, who accumulated several powers according to the principle of monarchic-theocratic absolutism (supreme judge, commander of the city army or the power to administrate the heritage of the unique god)<sup>2</sup>. The Sumerian state-cities are based on a vast bureaucratic system and “a proprietary army formed of freemen working in the fields or in constructions (dams, temples)<sup>3</sup>, in times of peace”.

The 11<sup>th</sup> century state-city model (Venice), progressively creating a true Thallasocratic commercial empire, is however different: the state-city is led by a Doge and a Council with enhanced attributions. Venice is a state-city which “has always set bounds to the absolutism of the sovereign, constantly limiting the powers of the Doge and avoiding his acknowledgement as supreme leader of the state”<sup>4</sup>. During the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century, Patrician families from Venice formed an oligarchy which “guaranteed that the authority of the Doge was undermined and which dominated the popular Assembly”. Practically, the oligarchy of the Patrician families in Venice “competed against the authority of the Doge, substituted it and limited the role of the absolute sovereign, with the Doge becoming instead the first magistrate of the state”<sup>5</sup>.

Venice was considered an example of “state-city and sovereign state, a blend of elements specific to the monarchy, democracy and aristocracy”<sup>6</sup>, enjoying sovereignty (the Republic of the Lion or *La Serenissima*). The *serrata* of the Great Council, the law passed in 1297, which limits the number of members in the *Maggior Consiglio*, defines the rule of aristocracy (the Venice patriciate) over this state-city, as an absolute ruling class, passing down the power over Venice and over its commercial empire, from generation to generation<sup>7</sup>. The hierarchical structure (with the Doge at the top) is replaced with a horizontal structure (which represents the power of the oligarchy)<sup>8</sup>. The Great Council generates the body with tasks in external affairs (the Senate, *Consiglio dei Pregadi*), and the superintenders (or Ministers of the Republic), in questions of war and governance (called *Savi*), as well as the Council of Ten (a true Committee of Public Salvation, tasked to ensure the state security)<sup>9</sup>. We also mention the institution of the Three Inquisitors (in charge of counterespionage), derived from the Council of Ten<sup>10</sup>. The state-city also includes its own judiciary system, the so-called *Quarantia* or

offensive (expansion and creation of a regional empire) or defensive (construction of defence fortifications) dimension of the ancient state-city. See *Istoria universală, vol. I, Preistoria și antichitatea [Universal History. Prehistory and Antiquity]*, translated by Laura-Florina Drăghici and Dana Ducu, Bucharest, All, 2012, pp. 101-103. Statalized ancient metropolises are led by kings, based on a hierarchical power organization model, which is vertical and which is completely different from the horizontal democratic organization of today’s metropolises.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>4</sup> Claudio Rendina, *Dogii Veneției. Istorie și secrete*, translated by Radu Gâdei, Constantin Vlad, Bucharest, All, 2003, pp. 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

Supreme Court of the Republic<sup>11</sup>. The Doge of this state-city chairs the Small Council (*Minor Consiglio Signoria*), which consists of six counsellors and three heads of the Supreme Court of the City, with the task of fulfilling all the decisions adopted by the Venetian bodies, in every field<sup>12</sup>.

Together, *Signoria* and *Savi* handle external affairs-related tasks, make decisions in various ecclesiastic and administrative issues, and receive ambassadors, province committees, prelates and magistrates<sup>13</sup>.

Venetians are seen as “peculiar island people, whose marshy islands were united in a republic”, a state-city which became “the most important commercial state, master of Eastern commerce and supreme naval force of the time. For over a thousand years, Venice was a unique structure, half oriental, half occidental”<sup>14</sup>, according to the historians.

This state-city self-called “*La Serenissima*”, “a city of waters, based on the progressive development of a system of canals, with the capital city in Venice, built on an archipelagos, in the heart of the lagoon, with a central aquatic boulevard, called Canal Grande, on which the Doges travelled in luxurious gilded boats”, a state-city in which “the houses had gates on the water”, is seen as a “lonely lion”, as an “amphibious society”<sup>15</sup>.

The politics of this state-city evolved from “a patriarchal democracy to an airtight aristocratic oligarchy (based on dynasties of noble families, and after 1297 the power was reserved to a group of patrician families”<sup>16</sup>. The executive power was progressively transferred from these patrician families to a city body, the Council of Ten, and to another, less transparent body, the Council of Three, elected once a month, by rotation<sup>17</sup>. Venice was also defined as a “police-ruled state-city”, as well as “the greatest maritime power of its time (in terms of size, firepower and efficiency, the supreme shipbuilding yard of the world)”<sup>18</sup>.

This state-city built its own commercial empire, a Thallasocratic empire, spreading from the Adriatic Sea and the Eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, to the control of commercial routes to Persia, India and China<sup>19</sup>. The supremacy of Venice was undermined when Constantinople was conquered in 1453, as well as by the journey made by Vasco da Gama to India, in 1498, when it lost monopoly over trade with the Orient<sup>20</sup>. Napoleon ended the Republic, dissolving its government and putting an end to Venice’s 11 centuries of independence<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> See Jan Morris, *Veneția*, translated by Laura Ciochină, Iași, Polirom, 2016, pp. 23-24.

<sup>15</sup> *Idem*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 25.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 25.

Venice is an example of state-city which governed itself with a proprietary structure of power, which was not necessarily a vertical and monarchic structure (as in the case of Sumerian state-cities), which was sovereign, handled external affairs-related tasks, had its own military force, and was acknowledged at international level (having its own fleet), which managed to build an international commercial empire. Venice is an example of how far a city can go during its evolution.

A network of authorities was progressively built and consolidated during the feudal era; these authorities were overlapping, local, personal, supra-state authorities, marked by the lack sovereignty (as we currently see it<sup>22</sup> – an absolute and exclusive jurisdiction of the state/sovereign over a certain territory). The medieval world is a type of complex, multi-layered order, consisting of a “network of kingdoms, principalities, ducats and other centres of power, further complicated by the occurrence of *alternate political structures of cities*”<sup>23</sup>.

*The medieval state-city stands out as a particularly powerful political actor* (Genoa, Florence, Venice etc.), which is able to influence the power game in a certain political system. In this medieval world, *the cities and federations of cities* have an enhanced role, with independent resources, autonomous governance systems, stipulated in the *Charters of the cities*<sup>24</sup>. The Italian state-cities “become candidates to the regional political authority, being however incapable of determining by themselves the leading pattern of medieval Europe”<sup>25</sup>, according to the historians, because they function “in an ambiguous political environment”, in which the concept of “Europe” is seen from the religious (Latin Christianity), trans-territorial perspective, as a unit of civilization. The uniting focal point of the entire medieval European system was the unitary religion (the Christian world), with several trans-state competing authorities (the Pope, the Holy Romano-German Empire, Byzantium)<sup>26</sup>.

*In the Westphalian system*, which is based on nation-states as the sole accepted political model of organizing power, with the states being the sole subject of international law, with sovereignty, original and principal in relation to other entities, *the nation-state has seen its downfall and has disappeared completely as a form of autonomous governance, distinct from the nation-states*.

It is likely however that the state-city model be brought back in the global order (as a complex post-state order, which generates and maintains a series of non-state actors actively competing against the nation-state), particularly as a more efficient form of implementing the principle of sustainable (durable) development, in a century of massive and fast urbanization, of global urban civilization.

<sup>22</sup> David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, Jonathan Perraton, *Transformări globale. Politică, economie și cultură*, translated by Ramona-Elena Lupașcu, Adriana Ștraub, Mihaela Bordea, Alina-Maria Turcu, Iași, Polirom, 2004, pp. 58-59.

<sup>23</sup> *Idem*, p. 59.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.

*The City, Today. An Attempt to Define “the 21<sup>st</sup> Century City”*

If we are to define “the 21<sup>st</sup> century city” from the standpoint of the theory of organization, we could regard it as *a collective actor* (the community of citizens, its inhabitants, be they permanent or transient), as well as *an individual actor*, with an identity, culture, history, traditions, with an economic-social, demographic and political profile, standing out from other metropolises and megalopolises, in the *global order of metropolises*.

According to the UN studies, in which the 21<sup>st</sup> century is defined as an “urban century”, the urban population is identified by using three main criteria: “the number of people living under the jurisdiction of a city, the number of people living in areas with a high density of residential structures (urban agglomerations), and the people tied to an urban centre (metropolitan area) through economic links”<sup>27</sup>.

As noted by the UN studies, it is estimated that in the near future (by 2030), “the overwhelming majority of the new population – 88% of the natural growth figure recorded between 2000 and 2030 – will be represented by inhabitants of cities in low or average-income countries”<sup>28</sup>. The specialists consider that the growth of the urban population on the globe is sped up by “the massive and constant migration from the rural areas to the cities, as well as the natural increase of the existing urban population”<sup>29</sup>.

As acknowledged by the doctrine, “the cities concentrate the economic power of the states, while the *shopping made by* the urban population is the basis of national economies, apart from *agriculture-based economy*”<sup>30</sup>. Practically, the *consumption economy* is maintained as a functional model, in cities and megacities, which are regarded as “*consumer communities*”.

*The decision-making importance of the representatives of megacities and cities* grows with the spread of instruments of democratic governance at global level. The *representatives of megacities and cities* result from free elections, and are in charge of the most diverse issues concerning the management of their resources: environmental issues, the right of women and of underprivileged people, education, parking, and transportation, ensuring entertainment in the urban environment, as well as public order and cleanliness<sup>31</sup>.

In an attempt to define the city, one author regards it as “a physical and social mechanism meant to obtain and deliver natural essential products to a concentrated population, such as drinking water. Infrastructure is the physical part of this mechanism, while the social part includes markets, the government and community organizations”<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Kai N. Lee, *O lume în curs de urbanizare*, in vol. *Starea lumii. Viitorul nostru urban*, The Worldwatch Institute, Linda Starke, edition translated by Nicolae Damaschin, Technical Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> *Idem*, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

The city can be regarded as an organization in itself, and it can be included on a map of metropolises and megalopolises of the world, *i.e.* it becomes *an element of a global network of organization-cities*, as distinct structures of regional, as well as infra-national power. They evolve to the point in which they attribute the very nation-state a certain prestige, a particular symbolism, they contribute to the economy of the state, to its national identity, as “centres of soft power” (cultural, economic, technological, scientific, locations of important national and international institutions).

Can we talk about *a society of organizations, in the sense of “a society of organization-states”*? Is it too soon to consider that the 21<sup>st</sup> century cities (metropolises and megalopolises) have become aware of their power as political, economic, cultural actors, *distinctly from any other entities* (including the nation-state) or that, through their specific representatives (the Mayor, the City Council), they could form a “society of metropolises”, in a gradual and conscious manner, including the level of *unitary metropolitan legal regimes* (applicable to metropolises from a certain region or even at international level). A society of organization-cities also entails *the conscious building of politicized relations* among the metropolises and their inhabitants, as well as *the right of the metropolises to represent their permanent inhabitants* (with the status of citizens of the respective metropolis) *as such, in special organizations of the metropolises*, as types of mega-actors of a urban world par excellence, seeking and progressively building its own form of organization and political representation, inspired sometimes by the state model.

In addition, the 21<sup>st</sup> century metropolis cannot be excluded from *the main cultural actors, which can influence the conflicts among civilizations, with a major role (maybe greater than the role of the nation-states) from the standpoint of the paradigm of war among civilizations*. The cultural role of the metropolis is an obvious one, an essential role, which influences and generates to a great extent the prestige and identity of a nation-state, including its relations with other states (a role *enhanced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an urban century*, by the criteria and representative methods of the states).

In our opinion, the *premise of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as an urban century* (as stated by the international reports and studies, many of them issued under the aegis of the UN) sets up certain major *theoretical* directions, as well as *materialization* opportunities regarding the metropolises and their role in this century:

- The metropolises and megalopolises are sufficiently *flexible* structures, *in full expansion* (territorial, economic, cultural, scientific, demographic, to project their identity and prestige)

- The metropolises and megalopolises *begin to become aware of their own power*, in relation to any other state or non-state actor in the global order

- They are *also* forms of *cultural organization* (they are *distinct entities*, with the function of cultural representation of both the nation-state to which they belong and the civilizational region in which they are included). Therefore, they are *civilizational actors* which can have a direct or soft influence on the power game, at global level, in a global order of civilizations (seen as distinct political actors).

- In the future, the metropolises and megalopolises can develop *politicized relations with their permanent inhabitants, whom they will transform into metropolitan citizens*, with specific rights; the metropolises can reserve *the right to send their own representatives to the organizations of metropolises, at regional and global level*.

- The metropolises and megalopolises *have and support their own forces to secure public order and stability, immediate help in case of emergency, calamities, natural disasters, war etc.* (metropolitan police, patrols to ensure public order, volunteer bodies etc., going as far as renting private military troops or public order-ensuring bodies)<sup>33</sup>. In the future, the mega-cities will be able to create their own legitimacy against organized crime or to pay private troops for services of guard, protection, organization of aid in various situations of calamity, war etc.

- The mega-cities can *form their own diplomacy (departments of external affairs/metropolitan diplomacy within the Metropolitan City Halls)*, thus contributing to and developing *their own intelligence and contact networks with other metropolises, and creating a vast network of metropolises, with their own departments of external affairs within the General City Hall*, as well as *their own representatives at regional and global organizations of the metropolises*. Witnessing the growth and proliferation of the role of *organizations that represent metropolises, as well as megalopolises*, as distinct political actors, in relation to all the other state or non-state entities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is natural in an urban century.

- The metropolises and megalopolises *generate their own revenues, have their own resources*, they are strong economic, financial-banking, scientific and technological *network nodes*, business centres, connection points for the various transnational flows (communications, transports, ideas, information, goods etc.); therefore, it is expected that the *role of the General Mayor, as well as that of the district/arrondissement mayors is enhanced*, as a result of the citizens' referendums.

- The General City Halls of the metropolises already nurture a strong and permanent political relationship (participative democracy) with their inhabitants: they can organize *consultative referendums for their inhabitants* (direct instrument of democratic power and democratic legitimacy for the metropolis representatives), whenever they want.

- The metropolises and megalopolises<sup>34</sup> become *mechanisms with enhanced legitimacy and effectiveness, as compared to the nation-states*, because the former

<sup>33</sup> We mention the initiative of the city of Mumbai/India, regarding the control or authority to solve crime in the city slums. The first panchayat groups were created in the slums, in October 2004, based on the premise that protection needs to be personalized; panchayat groups are councils consisting of five respectable elders, acknowledged by the community, which make decisions in key issues. The police are also represented in these councils – the neighborhood policeman. A distinct characteristic is the fact that these groups are consist mainly of women, since there is a need to involve women in the new protection system in the slums of this megalopolis. Each panchayat group covers a population of 10,000 people, being the moral and legal authority in the respective community. See Kalpana Sharma, Assistant Editor-in-Chief, *The Hindu, India, chapter: Peisaje urbane: Mumbai. Poliția asigurată de populație [Urban Landscapes: Mumbai. Police Assured by Population]*, in volume *Starea lumii. Viitorul nostru urban*, The Worldwatch Institute, Linda Starke, translated by Nicolae Damaschin, Bucharest, Technical Publishing House, 2008, pp. 197-198.

<sup>34</sup> Defined as urban agglomerations with over 10 million inhabitants, such as Tokyo, Mumbai, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, New York, Delhi, Shanghai, Kolkata, Dhaka, Jakarta, Lagos, Karachi, Buenos Aires. According to

are based on participative democracy (organization of consultative referendums for their inhabitants), rather than direct representative democracy (direct election of the General Mayor, of the district mayors, of the City Council, through local elections held for the inhabitants of the respective metropolis).

- The metropolises and megalopolises start to *develop their own body of legal stipulations, applicable at city level*, regarding the quality of urban life, city expansion, and the quality of services provided by the city, problems specific to the communities in the respective city.

- The metropolises and megalopolises start to *exchange experience, know-how in the management of urban issues with other metropolises* (one example are the summits for metropolis mayors, on various global issues), gradually defending a body of legal stipulations and practical, technical methods for the management of certain common issues and interests of the mega-cities, at regional or even international level.

- The 21<sup>st</sup> century can gradually witness the occurrence of *a law of metropolises at regional level* (legal norms specific for the organization and functioning of certain metropolises in a certain region or civilizational area of the world). For example, *a law of metropolises in the Asia-Pacific region, a law of metropolises in the Eurasian area, a law of metropolises in the EU, a law of metropolises in Latin America, a law of metropolises in Central Asia and the Middle East etc.*

- Mega-cities in a certain region of the planet *can form leagues or regional/transcontinental federations or cities* (the League of Eurasian Metropolises, the Confederation of Metropolises in the Asia-Pacific area, the League of Metropolises in the Central Asia and Caucasus area, the Confederation of Metropolises in the Transatlantic Occidental area), in order to identify and optimally protect their common interests.

### Conclusions

Since the dawn of time, the city has been a political actor strong enough to have a geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic influence on the regional and even global order of its time. The city has even created its own form of statalization, ensuring a political connection to its inhabitants, who become “metropolitan citizens”.

Besides its economic and cultural power, the city has exercised a political power, through direct and indirect methods (soft power, hard power). For millennia, the city has been even an imperial nucleus (the centre of a powerful empire, formed progressively around it and controlled through the decision focused within it, or candidate/rival of an already notorious imperial power (Cartagena versus Rome, Thallasocratic imperial cities – Sparta and Athens, Mesopotamian state-cities, which created hydraulic regional empires, the Italian republic-cities in the medieval Europe etc.)

Kai N. Lee, *O lume în curs de urbanizare*, in *Starea lumii. Viitorul nostru urban [A World on Course of Urbanization in The State of the World. Our Urban Future]*, The Worldwatch Institute, Linda Starke, edition translated by Nicolae Damaschin, Bucharest, Technical Publishing House, 2008, p. 8.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century defined as an “urban century”, the mega-cities are already actors with the potential *to compete* against states and *to create a different profile for the entire international order*. The 21<sup>st</sup> century transitions from a Westphalian century (focused on the nation-state) to a *different type of world, dominated by metropolises and megalopolises as political actors* (the global order of metropolises is a type of post-state order).

A global order of metropolises may include a special regulatory body regarding accountability and relationships among the metropolises and megalopolises; there can also be regional and international organizations for representing metropolises and megalopolises, while the attributions of the General Mayor and the City Council are enhanced (as far as becoming true metropolitan governments), in a world of networks of metropolises and megalopolises, which use the mechanisms of participative democracy, combined with the mechanisms of representative democracy, in order to protect their specific interests.

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