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**A POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY WITHOUT A METROPOLIS AND SOCIAL  
ACTORS FOR CONTEMPORARY URBAN DEVELOPMENT**

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**Discussion Paper**

on

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**THE EUROPEAN METROPOLIS**

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A Post-Industrial Society without a Metropolis and Social  
Actors for Contemporary Urban Development

Commentary on the communication of Mr. Klaus Mueller-Hold  
titled "The European Metropolis" by  
Professor Michel Bassand

The presentation of Mr. Mueller-Hold is important from several viewpoints. Stemming from a comparison of four European societies - France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy and Great Britain - he synthesized the most salient facts concerning metropolitan Europe. Moreover, in the short time allocated to his presentation he not only analyzed metropolitan phenomena in Europe, but he also suggested numerous propositions for action. I particularly appreciated the principles he sketched in his conclusion.

Furthermore, Mr. Mueller-Hold is conscious of the fact that his synthesis cannot be applied to other countries in Europe or the world. Stemming from this observation I will develop my short commentary in two parts. The first will discuss an exception - a unique kind of country in that it has no metropolis: this is the case of Switzerland. I will state and affirm the definition of a metropolitan region as an agglomeration of one million citizens, following the criteria used by Mr. Mueller-Hold. Although I agree with the majority of points presented by my colleague, nonetheless, I regret that his analysis gives the impression that a metropolitan region is analagous to a large theatre stage devoid of actors. In my opinion, a metropolitan region is not a large social machine that unrelentingly produces effects that govern human action. On the contrary, the goal

oriented behaviour of people means they strive to reorganize metropolitan areas. Therefore, it is important to understand these actors within the context of a complex urban environment. Actions in metropolitan regions are located in the context of social actors, which form social metropolitan relations.

1. A Post-Industrial Society without Metropolitan Regions

It is not instructive to insist upon the well-known fact that notwithstanding its small surface area and population coupled with the absence of primary resources, Switzerland has one of the highest standards of living in the world. Furthermore, according to other well-known statistics, Switzerland is amongst the first group of countries in the world to establish a post-industrial society. Yet, in contrast to comparable countries, Switzerland does not contain a metropolitan region.

This subject is widely debated in Switzerland and many people try to prove that one metropolitan region exists. The following viewpoints are commonly presented:

- 1) Some people affirm that Switzerland is an immense metropolis of six million inhabitants having a poly-centric and linear spatial structure similar to the Netherlands. Observed from Sirius, and in very general terms, perhaps this interpretation is relevant. This affirmation, however, is not supported by the analysis of facts. In spite of communication systems of high quality - transport by roads, trains and air as well as telecommunications - the principal towns and urban agglomerations strongly claim both an economic and cultural autonomy and identity, which means it is impossible to subscribe to this thesis.
- 2) Likewise, those people who uphold that there are two metropolitan areas in Switzerland can be disproved. These people claim that (i) the Golden Triangle comprising Bern, Basel

and Zurich with about 1.5 million inhabitants and (ii) the croissant of Lemman, including Geneva and Lausanne with approximately half a million inhabitants, form two metropolitan regions. In my opinion, the discontinuities within these agglomerations are so great that it is impossible to integrate them as such.

- 3) Some people think that it is no longer possible to study urban phenomena in terms of traditional national boundaries. By challenging the concept of these political boundaries it is possible to disprove the existence of the two metropolitan regions cited above. It is true that the socio-economic exchanges across the frontiers of Switzerland are substantial, but these are strictly controlled by national and cantonal laws. These regulations are so strong that it is almost impossible to envisage the collective administration of these two regions as if they were homogenous metropolitan areas.

In sum, the definition of metropolitan areas is not only relevant with respect to geographical features. Like all other European countries Switzerland does have *urban* areas, but these areas are, in my opinion, local communities with socio-cultural, political and economic roots that are more fundamental than their physical features. According to this interpretation Switzerland does not have metropolitan regions. Rather, it has urban areas, such as those of Geneva, Lausanne, Basel, Bern and Zurich. Apart from the latter, which includes approximately 830,000 inhabitants, all of the others include between 250,000 and 400,000 persons.

I will not present or develop an analysis of these urban or micro-metropolitan areas, largely owing to lack of space and time. Rather, I will briefly account for the absence of metropolitan regions in Switzerland. The principal reason is of a

political kind. The federation and consociational democracy of Switzerland are so strong and vigorous that they inhibit the development of metropolitan regions. Fragmentation also persists owing to linguistic and religious diversity, which engenders diverse political viewpoints and policies. In sum, Switzerland is a mosaic of 26 Cantons that form a Confederation. The urban environment is one sector of society administered exclusively by the Cantons. During the last 30 years all of the federal political subjects related to the urban environment (in one way or another) have been treated as the responsibility of cantonal administrations. This practice is clearly illustrated by referring to housing policies and environmental problems concerning roads, land-use planning and regional policies. The Confederation has adopted a role of incitement and coordination in these areas. This practice was already established prior to the beginning of the industrial era in Switzerland. Many experts have discussed the peculiar characteristic of Swiss society which became industrialized without becoming urbanized. In sum, the fragmentation of the political system is the genesis of a piecemeal urban development which has not led to the development of metropolitan regions in Switzerland.

## 2. The System of Action in Urban Regions

The urban phenomena that Mr. Mueller-Hold analyzed are typical of those post-industrial societies that have been labelled elsewhere as programmed societies. Yet, as already suggested above, contemporary urban phenomena are not merely a new form of spatial organization, but also the expression of fundamental social relations in programmed societies which evoke new strategies and modes of urban life.

Following our analyses, those social relations that actively structure urban and metropolitan regions are bi-polar, at least

in their most simplified form: on the one hand, the technocracy and, on the other hand, the social movements of diverse groups of citizens. We do not think that the social relations within capitalist, industrialized societies have disappeared, but we uphold that they are no longer predominant or structural. Technocratic factors have become the set of major influence in programmed societies and, consequently, in urbanized regions. These factors regulate modernization and investment through the actions of large public and private organizations in the fields of production, distribution, transportation, education and research. Technocracy coupled with autonomy defines the objectives and the means of these organizations, largely in terms of efficiency: performance, functionalism, international competition, rationalism and rentability of a techno-economic kind are the fundamental criteria to be applied. Hence, technocracy transmits messages, norms, regulations and codes, which lead to the systematic programming of daily life. It is from this perspective that the concept of a programmed society has been developed. A minority with good intentions assumes the right to think and decide for the majority. Consequently, either consciously or unconsciously technocracy reduces the urban population to actors, consumers, obedient users and passive spectators.

Nonetheless, technocracy maintains that it defends the common good and general interests of society. In effect, by the means of policies and plans it identifies with collective values and reasonings, and with the natural order of things. Another feature of technocracy is that it tends to monopolize the distribution of information and knowledge, while it is commonly known today that he who knows is a person with power. Finally, it is noteworthy that technocracy only exists today in the form of a network of elite professionals, including engineers, economists, sociologists, lawyers, public relations officials, architects and town planners.

The principal opposition to a technocratic society stems from a broad class of user-consumer-residents. This large social class is formed by numerous individuals who hold subordinate positions within the processes of production, consumption and use. This class does not experience the economic, moral and political circumstances of the working classes of the 19th century: requirements of mass production have increased their education, improved their health and housing conditions and their income. The unhappiness and suffering of this sector of the population is related to its economic, its cultural, political and moral alienation, its dependence and its resignation.

The opponents of technocracy express their discontent by numerous social movements, which appear to be disorganized, uncoordinated and without a common objective. Moreover, these social movements do not seem to group together all those individuals who find themselves in identical contexts. Nonetheless, in spite of their diversity, these social movements do not go unnoticed by many urban residents. Their characteristics can be classified with respect to the following features:

- (i) a search for identity;
- (ii) the elaboration of projects founded on the autonomous, spontaneous participation of citizens who wish to be themselves; and
- (iii) the designation of an adversary: whereas this had commonly been the bourgeoisie, it is now technocracy.

Initially, these social movements are usually latent, deriving from a current of public opinion. Subsequently, these movements are expressed by diverse struggles which may become violent, such as public debates, street demonstrations, squatting and challenge to law and order. We shall briefly mention five social movements actually occurring in urban contexts.

1. The Student and Young Persons' Movements

During the ongoing genesis of programmed societies the future of young people is uncertain. Many adolescents consider that their training is inadequate and too authoritarian. The life-style they are proposed does not convince them. It is true that at different epochs the young seek their identity, but currently their searching includes a claim for autonomy in many areas such as education and social, political and cultural affairs. Young people criticize diverse forms of constraints inflicted upon them and demand autonomy. It is by confrontation that they discover the technocratic adversaries. As their claim questions society at large, the young citizens face widespread opposition, which engenders discouragement, introversion and lack of hope.

2. The Women's Movements

Feminist claims were made a century ago and they were and still are important achievements. However, they have also engendered new problems. Moreover, the economic, social and political dependence of women can be resolved only over a long period of time. The claims of women are very diverse, yet they have an underlying theme of both individual and collective autonomy. They demand that abortion is legalized; that the traditional family structure which binds them to a dependent role is changed; they seek to reduce male prejudice, to establish educational and cultural centres for women; they challenge existing unpunished actions, notably rape, battering and sexual perversion, which commonly remain unchallenged by men. It is generally with respect to these claims that women find their strongest adversaries, notably those male, public administrators who establish norms, rules and laws for women, without consulting female citizens.



### 3. Ecological Movements and Urban Struggles

These social movements are the best known and the most turbulent. The claims of their advocates challenge nuclear power stations, motorways, large urban developments and abusive renovation projects, the pollution of air and land, and the proliferation of noise and ugliness. These movements defend the natural environment and cultural heritage. They confront technocracy, including the advocates of land speculation and building construction, rationalization and those who seek modernization. Ecologists discover that the stake of these claims is not merely the protection of the biosphere, an urban neighbourhood or part of a cultural heritage, but rather the promotion of a new type of society. Consequently, they challenge existing modes of production and change. They defend and promote more humane urban environments as well as more democratic administrations. They prescribe, amongst others, the administration of everyday life at the level of the neighbourhood and suburbs, by new procedures for local democracy.

### 4. Anti-governmental and Anti-bureaucratic Movements

These movements are, above all, against government bureaucracies and private corporations. The protagonists of these movements maintain that these institutions are inefficient, costly and counter-productive. The hospital produces illness; the school dulls the mind; Nation States provoke dissidence and war; transport companies slow down exchanges; prisons induce their "lodgers" to more crime; churches produce atheists, and the family is the source of divorce. Moreover, many large organizations are repressive and create obstacles for human liberty and dignity. Sometimes these anti-bureaucratic movements are violent and destructive, but usually they are passive, seeking human rights.

## 5. Alternative Movements

These movements seek an alternative life-style at a local level notably in the fields of education, cultural or family affairs, and employment. They practice hic et nunc self-government and conviviality. This class of social movements is lively and strong in Scandinavia, Great Britain, West Germany and most of the urban regions of Switzerland.

None of the above-mentioned movements is rigorously isolated from the others. They usually share a common cultural framework which includes a style of dress, music, language and values. Moreover, the theme of autonomy is generalized in each of these movements, as is their common refusal of economic growth.

This analysis should not lead one to believe that all the population in the urban regions of Switzerland is divided between the technocracy and these new social movements. In fact, these two classes of citizen, although very dynamic only represent about 10% of the population. The other citizens of these urban regions can be classified into at least the three following categories, whose relative importance is difficult to gauge.

- 1) The modernist-conformists, who enthusiastically adopt various features of mass culture and contemporary life-style; they are not concerned by their dependence;
- 2) the traditional-conformists, who accept the values of a capitalist, industrialized society, especially those values related to work, order, security, cleanliness and private property;
- 3) the anonymous; this category includes the majority of citizens, whether healthy or ill, young or old, who have been profoundly affected by contemporary social changes. These people have lost their identity, they have no will or motivation. Their resignation, confusion and apathy often lead them to use alcohol or narcotics as a refuge. Sometimes they are induced to deviance, crime or suicide.