



## Discussing the Shift of the Urban Discourses from Metropolis to Metapolis in the Twenty First Century

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### Abstract

The aim of this discussion is to reveal that there is a shift in the urban discourses from metropolis to metapolis in the world of the twenty first century. This is a global and digital world mainly characterized by the information and communication technology. This technology leads the images of the cities to be shared, experienced and consumed instantly on social media such as Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, Tumblr, etc. Metapolis or metacity is therefore defined as mediacity. Media leads cities to be a consumable entity. Cities are therefore conceived as any other commodity. Not only transportation, but also information and communication technology accelerate the processes of consumption and commodification in the city. These processes characterize metropolis as well as metapolis. However, metapolis is the advanced model of metropolis. As such, metapolis is the city of the informational age whereas metropolis is the city of the industrial age. So, it is the new global model of city of the new century. It is defined by its fragmentality, heterogeneity, discontinuity, complexity and multiplicity. Media promotes these metropolitan qualities by turning the cities into fragmented images. These images reveal that cities become even more heterogeneous and discontinuous structures. They are created by complex transportational and communicational networks. It leads metropolitan cities to be rhizomatic and multicentric places. Besides, metapolis is seen as the place of places or the placeless place. It is surprising to see the fact that metropolitan cities embrace this quality as their singular identity in the global and digital world of the twenty first century.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Polis* is an ancient Greek term etymologically means city. [1] *Metropolis* and *metapolis* are discussed in this paper as the urban discourses referring to the changes in culture and society. The consumption culture is the dominant culture in most of the societies in the world of this century. It leads a radical change in cities. The aim of this discussion is to reveal the shift from metropolis to metapolis discourse to define the contemporary characteristics of the city. In this context, it is revealed in the paper that cities turn into metapolises in the twenty first century. It is mainly due to the fact that global economic models change, as such late capitalism or neoliberalism now dominates the world. Neoliberalist economy, as the extension and exaggeration of the capitalist economy, redefines the relations between production and consumption processes. It accelerates and distinguishes these processes in the city. [2] This leads the term of metapolis to emerge so as to define the new global city.

However, metropolis is still a widely used term to define and discuss the big cities of this century. But metapolis is beyond bigness. It differs from metropolis with its new urbanity characterized by *fragmentality*, *heterogeneity*, *discontinuity*, *complexity* and *multiplicity*. Besides, one of the main characteristics of a metapolis is its consumable entity. Metropolis is also a fragmented, heterogeneous, discontinuous, complex and multi-layered model of city. It can also be evaluated as a commodity. Nevertheless, metapolis is an advanced model of metropolis. The metropolitan city refers to a consumption process structured and oriented

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by the information and communication technologies. These technologies lead architectural and urban images to be produced and consumed rapidly more than ever.

Metropolis is, therefore, identified with the information age while metropolis is rather defined as the city of the industrial age. Industrial developments pave the way for the city to be reconstructed by the new material and constructional technologies. The metropolitan city is seen as the natural result of these technologies supported by the transportation technologies as well. Particularly metro, as a subway, promotes the fragmented characteristic of the metropolis by presenting disjuncted urban scenes to the city-dwellers. Disjunction and fragmentation are enhanced in the metropolis. Information and communication technologies enable the fragmented images of the metropolitan city to be reproduced by turning them into commodities. These images are instantly shared, liked, disliked or commented on media (particularly on social media such as Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, Tumblr, etc.). That's why; metropolis or metacity is also defined as mediacity. [3] The prefixes of *metro-* and *meta-* indicate that cities change not only physically but also culturally and socially. These changes lead cities to be mainly defined as metropolis and metapolis since the last century.

## 2. METROPOLIS AND METAPOLIS

Metropolis is a term particularly used to define the city of the twentieth century. It is defined in accordance with the developments in the industry. [4] Hilberseimer defines metropolis as the product of the industrialization of the world. He even introduces a new type of architecture called as *metropolisarchitecture* with its own laws and forms. [5] As Hilberseimer, Koolhaas discusses that metropolis generates a new urbanism and a new architecture with its own theorems, laws, methods, breakthroughs and achievements. For Koolhaas, one of them is *bigness*. Big and high-rise buildings are the characteristics of the metropolises. He reveals that the district of Manhattan in the New York city, as a metropolis, is characterized and congested by its skyscrapers (Figure 2.1). He discusses it as the culture of congestion. [6]



**Figure 2.1.** *The City of the Captive Globe Project designed by Rem Koolhaas to reveal the architectural and urban character of New York in 1972. [7]*

So, it is not a discussion merely based on the physical changes in cities. It is also a discussion based on the cultural and social changes. Simmel suggests that there is an extreme social alienation in the crowded and congested metropolitan environment. It is an environment where bodily proximity and narrowness of space make the mental distance more visible. Besides, he discusses the multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life in the metropolis. [8] Developments in the industry and transportation technology promote *fragmentality*, *heterogeneity*, *discontinuity* and *complexity* as well as *multiplicity* in the city. These developments lead new city centers to emerge and change the periphery. Metropolis is therefore defined as a fragmented, heterogeneous, discontinuous, complex and multi-layered city. However, it is generally seen as a big city, which absorbs towns and villages around, resulting in a mix of city and country. [9]

But it is important to recognize that metropolis is not only an enlargement of the city. Metropolis differentiates itself according to its characteristics, not only according to its size. A city becomes a metropolis through the introduction of certain economic phenomena, primarily through the concentration of capital, people and the industrial exploitation of both. Thus, metropolis is defined as the intersections of the flow of human activity, economics and spirit (Figure 2.2). The city, and above all, the metropolis is not an independent organism existing for itself alone. Metropolis grows with and is connected to the people who produce it; the all-encompassing economic system connects it to the world. [5]



**Figure 2.2.** *Metropolis is a cult movie directed by Fritz Lang in 1927. The city in the movie is designed to show the spirit of space and time in the metropolis. [10]*

This system is respectively called as the capitalist, late capitalist and neoliberalist economy in the world of the twentieth century. Metropolis becomes the model of city controlling the flow of money and transforming it into capital. [8] Big and spectacular buildings are the manifestations of the capital accumulated in the city (Figure 2.3). Not only the city, but also the society is defined as being spectacular in the last century. [11] It enhances commodification eventually. As such, Simmel defines metropolis as a place where commodification dominates social, cultural and even mental life in the city. Yet, it is a fact that metropolis is characterized by the constant flow of people, goods and money. [8]



**Figure 2.3.** *Walt Disney Concert Hall designed by Frank Gehry in 1988 in Los Angeles. It is one of the buildings reflecting the architectural style of Gehry to contribute the city of Los Angeles culturally, socially and financially. [12]*

Ascher discusses this flow as mobility. He discusses that mobility is one of the main characteristics of the metropolis. However, metropolis is an advanced model of the metropolitan city. Non-physical mobility of information characterizes the metropolis rather than the physical mobility of people, goods or money. New information and communication technologies lead a new urbanity to be defined as the metropolis at the end of the twentieth century. The first definition of metropolis is made by Ascher in 1995. He defines it as a city, which functions like a network, or like a network of networks accelerate the mobility of information. It is

the metapolization process in which people switch between networks, between social universes, employing a combination of real and virtual methods of communication. [9]

Although the term of metapolis is not easy to grasp, the prefix of *meta-* refers to the recent physical, cultural and social changes in cities. It refers to the fact that today's cities are mainly constructed in accordance with today's consumption-oriented societies. [13] It is the culture of consumption, which constructs our identities and our cities. And today, they all turn into commodities. Even the culture itself is a commodity, as Adorno reveals previously. [14] Besides, the metapolis theory reveals that the city is now totally commoditized by its images. Despite the fact that the images of the metropolises are also commoditized in the postcards, photographs or films, the images of the metapolises are instantly produced, shared and consumed on media by using the information and communication technologies. That's why; metapolis or metacity is redefined as mediacity. [3] It is the city in which commodification and consumption become highly accelerated processes. It is the city of flows of information and images.

Metapolis is therefore an even more fragmented and discontinuous city than metropolis. The new transportation vehicles and technologies promote fragmentality and discontinuity in the metropolitan cities. But the new information and communication technologies really break the cities into fragments in such a way that there is not a contiguity between the fragments those make them up. According to Ascher, it is the first distinctive character between metropolis and metapolis. The second one is the disappearance of the stable and balanced territorial organizations in the metropolitan cities. Thus, Ascher discusses that metapolis is the name given to those urban phenomena going beyond the metropolitan scale, free itself from any territorial medium to base itself on interconnection networks composed of visible means of transport and invisible means of communication. [15] However, metapolis is rather characterized by the information and communication networks than the transportation networks of the city.

Castells suggests that we now live in a network society. It is the model of society created by the networks of the twenty first century. [16] The model of city changes together with the model of society. As it is discussed throughout the paper, the contemporary model of city is defined as metapolis. It is defined as a multicity consists of many city centers. The multicity of this century is the constellation of attractors. If the traditional city is a space constructed by using techniques such as centrality, homogeneity, continuity and hierarchy, then the contemporary city is characterized by the late capitalist modes of constructions. As such, the city is no longer constructed by the city-territory or center-periphery oppositions, but rather by the transport and communications infrastructure as a vector of mobility. [2]

Discourses on metapolis are based on the fact that city is made up of multi-layered, fragmented, heterogeneous, discontinuous and complex spaces and relations. It is a new contemporaneity beyond that of the metropolitan city. Metapolis is not only expressed in terms of growth, but also in combinations; combinations that allude to evidence of an informational, dynamical and uncertain process of interactions with the territory and with other territories, with the place and with other places. So, it is called as place of places. Metapolis as the place of places or the placeless place should not be reduced to a single ideal place -to be finished and rebuilt- nor as a unique or possible model. It should be considered as a decomposed and definitely unfinished multispace. [2]

Because of its multi-layered spatiality, metapolis is also defined by the terms of unpredictability and uncertainty. It is, therefore, significantly different from the modern city of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. According to Soja, the modern city is composed of highly controlled spaces and places (Figure 2.4). But the city of the twenty first century is a model of complex systems (Figure 2.5). However, complexity does not only define metapolis; it is one of the characteristics of metropolis, as Soja suggests. He defines it as postmetropolis to discuss the character of the global city of this century. [17] Besides, Sassen discusses the global city as the postindustrial model of city. [18] Metropolis and metapolis are both global models of city, but there are some critical differences between them due to the fact that metapolis refers to a heterogeneous urban space in which globality and locality are simultaneously supported whereas metropolis is also a heterogeneous urban space in which globality is superior to locality in such a way that it is conceived as a homogeneous space. [2] This paved the way for metropolis and metapolis to have different complexities as well.





**Figure 2.4.** Paris as a modern city (re)designed by Baron Haussmann in the nineteenth century. [19]



**Figure 2.5.** Any city as the complex model of city of the twenty first century. [20]

Batty discusses complexity as a distinctive characteristic of metropolis by referring to science and technology. He suggests that science and technology, or scientific technology do not only lead cities to be imagined and illustrated as machines or organisms. They also lead them to become interactive networks. It is the complexity of these networks that characterizes the metropolis of the twenty first century. For him, interactions, flows and networks are the manifestations of the complex scientific and technologic advancements in the city. [21]

It is a fact that there are many centers in the cities of this century. Flows and networks in these cities promote multicentricity. Metropolis is generally seen as the city within the city because of its multicentricity, density and complexity. In other words, it also has more than one city center as metropolis. But metropolis is the exaggerated version of metropolis; because it is the place of places, where numerous urban models coexist, each with its own qualities that make it different from the rest. [2]

MVRDV opens metropolis to discussion by designing *Metacity* or *Datatown* in 1999 (Figure 2.6). It is designed as the most contemporary model of city also illustrating the future city models in the 2000s. They discuss that the world is transforming into a more advanced state of the metacity due to the ever-expanding communication networks and the immeasurable web of interrelationships they generate. More and more regions become more or less continuous urban fields, which they call as metacity. It is the metamorphosis of the city. It is a global transformation as well. According to MVRDV, metacity is the web of economical and spatial possibilities. But this web is so complex to be able to comprehend. As such, they assert that metacity turns into a datatown and datatown is based upon data. It is a city that is described by information; a city with no given topography, no prescribed ideology, no representation, no context. It is a prelude to further explorations into the future of the metacity. [22]



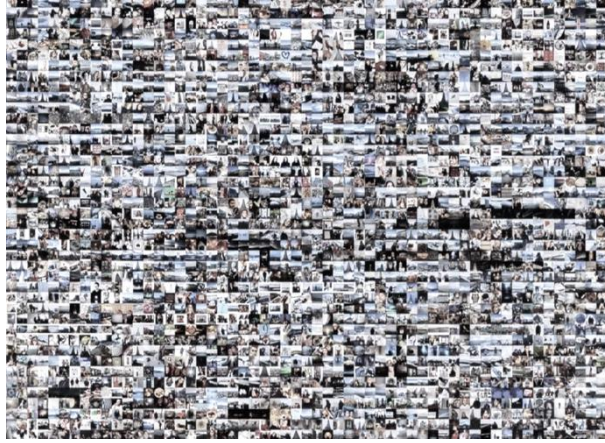
**Figure 2.6.** *Metapolis or Datatown designed by MVRDV in 1999. [23]*

This urban shift from meta to data explicitly reveals that today's city is not the conventional city of the nineteenth or twentieth century anymore. It is mainly due to the revolutionary advancements in the computer technology. Metropolis is therefore defined as the city of the industrial age, while metapolis is defined as the city of the digital age. [15] In this age, city is digitally produced, consumed and reproduced as any other commodity. Sharing and experiencing digital images of the city by using the information and communication technologies lead it to be consumed instantly. These technologies lead city to turn into data composed of a complex system of networks. Networks of visible (transportational) and invisible (communicational) systems... (Figure 2.7). This urban system is even beyond complexity and it does not have a static boundary. It is a complex and continuous structure with discontinuous structural fragments actually.



**Figure 2.7.** *SimCity as a digital city model imagined for today and future. [24]*

Fragmentation characterizes the contemporary city of this century. Holl discusses that our experience of the contemporary city is partial, fragmented and incomplete. It is the essence of the contemporaneity. [25] It essentially defines the metapolis of the twenty first century. Fragmentation is promoted by the commonly used social media platforms. The fragmented images of the cities shared on these platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter or Tumblr reveal that we do not much care to perceive the city with all of its fragments that make it a whole and a place throughout the history. These images give us the clues of place, but not in the full sense of the word. We live in a kind of Instagram world nowadays. It is an instacity as well as a metacity in which we live and share our experiences in this century (Figure 2.8). It digitalizes all the experiences and creates a new reality.



**Figure 2.8.** *Instacity project designed by Philip Frank Otto. This project is presented in the Popularity and Realism exhibition curated by Meg Cranston in 2018. It is an anthropological snapshot of the cities represented through the lens of Instagram. [26]*

It leads a radical shift discussed in the paper through the shift from metropolis to metapolis discourse so as to reveal that city and the architecture of the city cannot be defined by the dynamics and realities of the last century. There is now a city, which is realized, experienced and commoditized on the new digital platforms through the advanced computer technology. It is the new reality of most of the cities in the twenty first century. But it is surprising to see the fact that the cities embrace this as if it is their singularity, or singular identity.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Metapolis is discussed in this paper as a significant urban discourse to understand the current status of the city. This discussion is based on the distinctive qualities of metapolis and metropolis. As such, metapolis is mainly defined by the terms of fragmentality, heterogeneity, discontinuity, complexity and multiplicity. These are the terms also used to define the urban structure of the metropolis. However, as it is discussed throughout the paper, metapolis is a fragmented, heterogeneous, discontinuous, multilayered and multicentered city in which these urban qualities are exaggerated. It is made up of heterogeneous and discontinuous fragments and there is not any physical, cultural or social relation between these fragmented places. It leads to a complexity, which cannot only be defined by multicentricity.

Besides, it is a fact that metapolis has many city centers as metropolis. But metapolis refers to a complexity not only characterized by the congested and crowded transportational routes and activities, but also informational and communicational networks in the city. These networks turn the metapolitan city into a mediatic as well as a rhizomatic and multicentric urban structure. The city is now conceived as a sum of images shared and experienced on social media supported by the advanced information and communication technology. Metapolis or metacity is therefore discussed here as mediacity and instacity as well. Metacity is the model of the informational city whereas metropolis is the model of the industrial city. It is the new global model of city of the twenty first century. It is promoted by the neoliberal economy. Neoliberal economy policies in cities establish a ground for them to be global attractors with their big, high-rise and spectacular buildings. These policies transform buildings and cities into touristic commodities. Their architectural and urban images are produced, consumed and reproduced through the screens of computers. It is the computer-based reality, which determines our tastes, habits, routines and lives in this century. It also defines and determines our culture and society. The culture of consumption dominates most of the cities and societies in today's world. Information and communication technology and social media promote consumption and commodification processes in cities. They lead city and culture to be conceived as a commodity even more than the last century. It is the new reality of the city by being a part of the global network of information and communication technology.

Almost every city, or even a small community today is involved in the network of this global and digital world. But all of them cannot be defined as metacity. It is not enough to be shared and experienced digitally

on media to be a metapolitan city. A metapolis is the city characterized totally through its mediatic images. Its cultural and social life are characterized by media. Media commodifies metapolis physically, culturally and socially as a global model of city. Thus, metapolis is beyond being a big city as metropolis. Its bigness is not only due to its blurring borders between city and country. It is also due to its commodified entity, which does not need physical borders. This leads metacity to be a placeless place in which the sense of place and belonging are lost eventually. It is therefore challenging to create the sense of belonging in this global world. Maybe it can again be possible by supporting the local as well as global. But it does not mean that some old architectural and urban approaches such as critical regionalism or postmodernism should be revitalized to support the site-specific values and identities. Instead, new ideas should be developed so as to gather the local and global values together. It should be conceived that these values build our identities and cities. It is a building process changes constantly in accordance with the new dynamics and realities of the new century. Although it is a fact that metapolis now defines the dominant model of city of the twenty first century, new models and urban discourses would emerge to redefine our lives in the future. No matter what they would be, it is critically important to understand that whether visible (i.e. city) or invisible (i.e. culture) some values cannot only be a commodity.



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