



GERMAN METROPOLITAN NETWORKS – AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE GLOBAL CITY

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Germany is currently rediscovering its city. The themes of crises and decay, which have been dominating the discussions on the city for a long time, are being superseded by a new passion for the city. For some decades, German cities have been losing population as well as jobs. This problem affected cities in East Germany the hardest after unification, as the loss of jobs, the decline in population and the moving away of young people with qualifications meant that East-German cities were faced with dramatic levels of negative growth. However, from the beginning of the twenty-first century, there have been clear signs for a change in urban development trends. Some profound economic changes occurred in cities and the enormous effects of globalisation and digitisation further accelerated these. The change from an industrial to a service-led economy, based on science and culture, particularly in the large West-German urban regions of Munich, Frankfurt, Cologne and Hamburg, meant the development of a new urban dynamic. We can now see a re-urbanisation in terms of employment as well as population, and even in the East-German cities this change is apparent. After a long phase of decline and negative growth, the population of some large cities such as Leipzig, Dresden and Berlin is once more increasing.

The urban system in Germany, as in many other countries, shows that globalisation and digitisation do not lead to a disintegration of the city, as predicted by many experts, but to a re-evaluation of the city and the development of a new form of urban centrality, which, in Germany, takes the form of a process of urbanisation. This means that it is the large cities, such as Munich, Frankfurt (Rhein-Main area), Hamburg, Cologne/Düsseldorf (Rhein area) and Stuttgart which benefit from this new urban dynamic. While in most other countries, dominant global cities have emerged with increasingly globalised economies, Germany has no veritable global city as such, but instead has a multi-polar urban system. As presented very convincingly by Saskia Sassen in various publications, the new type of global city in our globalised world takes on a strategic role. The control, integration and management functions of the commodity chains that are spread

throughout the world are concentrated in the global cities. At the same time, the global city is a central location for production and a trans-national market place for high quality, knowledge-based services. How can we explain the absence of a single German city among the top of the hierarchy of the system of global cities, even though Germany has held the position of 'export champion' for many years and has been exceptional with regards to the integration of its economy into the world market?

In answer to this question, the peculiarities and interruptions in German history are often referred to. The 'belated' nation of Germany, according to Plethener, once comprised a multitude of little states, principalities and free imperial cities. It only gained one common capital city when the Prussian democratic empire was founded in 1871. Berlin became the seat of government and, over the following decades, developed into Germany's dominant economical and cultural city. However, it never achieved the same level of centrality that London or Paris have. After the historic disasters of the Nazi regime and the Second World War, Berlin's central role was totally destroyed by the break-up of the German *Reich* and the split of Germany into four occupation zones. Many companies moved their headquarters from Berlin to West Germany. Following a resolution by the American occupation government, the new Bank Deutscher Länder (Bank of German States), which was the predecessor of the Deutsche Bundesbank, was founded in Frankfurt after the closure of the Reichsbank in Berlin. As a consequence, the Deutsche Bank and the Dresdner Bank moved their headquarters to Frankfurt. At the same time, the American occupation government decided to develop Frankfurt airport to be the central base of the US Airforce in Germany. Frankfurt's function as a gateway and an international financial centre were a direct result from these decisions. The advance of Munich to be a significant German centre for technology was a result of the move of the headquarters of Siemens, the largest German technology firm of post second-world-war years. It moved from insecure Berlin to Munich, which was also occupied by the American forces. Hamburg

took over Berlin's former role of a centre for news and media. The development of a very successful media cluster after 1945 benefited from the liberal licensing policy of the British occupying forces. With the creation of the German Federal Republic in 1949, the seat of government was moved to Bonn. Although the role of political capital was given back to Berlin after unification, it is unlikely that Berlin will ever regain its former central economical role.

This historical sketch implicitly classifies Germany's urban network as a special case in the hierarchy of the global urban system. Can Germany really be considered to be a special case that shows deficits? An alternative explanation for this can be found in the discussion on 'Varieties of Capitalism' (Hall / Soskice). If it is true that modern capitalism is not a homogeneous entity, but that different models of capitalism have developed under different historical conditions, then it is not unlikely that these different models also have correspondingly different patterns of urbanisation. The 'belated' industrial nation of Germany had already developed an alternative to the liberal production system at the end of the nineteenth century, which can be characterised as a form of regulated, corporate market economy. This model of 'Rheinian Capitalism' combined with strong federal structures, formed the basis for the economical and social system of West Germany. It is very likely that Germany has not only created an alternative model of production, but also an alternative and effective model of urbanisation.

Characteristic of this model of urbanisation is not only the poly-centrality of the urban system with its distinct complementary division of labour between individual cities, each of them specialising in a particular cluster of high quality services. Another attribute of this model is the phenomenon of regional 'manufacturing service districts'. Whereas globalisation in the 1980s and 1990s led to a strong global dispersion of industrial functions in the Anglo-Saxon countries, the urban regions in Germany still have a strongly interactive dynamic of developing knowledge-intensive industries and company-friendly services. Furthermore, the German urban system is connected to the European and global networks of cities. The individual cities can only develop their capacity and innovativeness in their specialisms with the help of very effective networks and cooperation. As Saskia Sassen quite rightly points out, a global city is by definition part of a network. This applies even more strongly to the urban system in Germany, whose multi-tiered networks are of a regional, national, European and global nature. Thus the German urban system could

prove to be a valid future alternative to the highly centralised model of the global city.

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