

ENVOI: GLOBAL CAPITAL, THE FUTURE OF NATIONAL CAPITALS AND OF THEIR PEOPLE¹

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ЗАКЛЮЧЕНИЕ. ГЛОБАЛЬНАЯ СТОЛИЦА, БУДУЩЕЕ НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫХ СТОЛИЦ И ИХ ЛЮДЕЙ

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The future of capital cities will depend, first of all, upon the future of nation-states.

In time, this future will turn out to be bright, contrary to global city consultancies. At the time of writing, this was underlined by the British referendum on leaving EU, where the Conservative government was risking tearing its party asunder on a referendum pitting two conceptions of the British nation-state against each other. That the outgoing mayor of London, Boris Johnson, challenged his own party government in campaigning for «Brexit» adds a nice embarrassing twist to the argument of global cities as unmoored from their original nation-states; so does the fact, that his successor, Sadiq Khan, was actively campaigning for Britain to stay in the EU.

The rise of immigration and border control as central political issue in most of Europe is not only redrawing national political maps to the right, it also hammers home that nations and nation-states are emerging, unlucky South Sudan being the most recent (in 2010). The demand for them is still growing: Catalonia and Scotland in Europe, Kurdistan and perennial Palestine in West Asia are the most visible. The international and national uproar against Russia's

reincorporation of Crimea (a Russian-speaking, largely pro-Russian, historically Russian peninsula which, following an internal 1950s Soviet redivision, became part of Ukraine) reaffirms the classical ideology of state nationalism.* The soil of the national territory is sacred, however recently and contingently acquired. The new Cold War between the United States and its NATO clientele, on one hand and Russia, on the other; the increasing national assertiveness of China and the reactions to it: all point more to a world of national-state geopolitics than to a stateless world economy of capital flows and business services.

Recent «globalization» has not drained capitalist nation-states of resources and capacity, even if it has changed their complacency. Between 200 and 2014, total public expenditure in the six largest economies of the rich OECD area increased from average increased from an average 41.8 per cent of GDP to 46.2³. Public social expenditure has risen substantially in Asia as well as in Latin America. Neither the nation-state nor the welfare state is shrinking, although the demand for the latter from populations of increasing age and with growing numbers of poor children are mounting ever faster.

Capitals and Other National Cities

National capital cities are in general very well placed in urban hierarchies and networks, international as well, as national and they are well connected in the global corporate networks.

Seven of the top ten are national capitals; only New York, Hong Kong and São Paulo are not. Among the fifteen with more than 60 per cent of possible index value, ten are capitals of nation-states.

Not all capitals are dominant cities of their nations, but most of them are, many of them very heavily so, such as Addis Abba, Athens, Bangkok, Budapest,

Buenos Aires, Cairo, Dakar, Dhaka, Jakarta, Manila, Lima, Paris, Santiago, Seoul, Tehran and Vienna, for example. Since São Paulo overtook Rio some eighty years ago, no second city has overtaken the capital since then in demographic or economic weight. Instead, the predominance of many capital cities has been reinforced: of London over the cities of the industrial north, of Tokyo over Osaka and virtually of all the post-Communist capitals of Eastern Europe over second cities, including Moscow in relation to Saint Petersburg. Some originally specialized political

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³OECD iLibrary. «General government expenditure statistics». The economies are France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK and United States.

capitals have grown into multifunctional metropolises, such as Ankara, Brasília, Delhi and Washington. Abuja and Astana are well under way. New constructions of a national capital have rapidly become the dominant city of their country, such as Gaborone in Botswana, Nouakchott in Mauritania, and Kigali in Rwanda. The future of specialized capitals built after independence is less certain and more dependent on vicissitudes of national politics, but some of them, like Dodoma in Tanzania and Lilongwe in Malawi, have already

shown the resilience transcending the lifespans of their original sponsor. Polycentric and bifocal national city systems certainly exist, most importantly in Western Europe – Germany, Italy the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland – but also in Cameroon, China, Colombia, India, Libya, and Vietnam, among others. In the examples just mentioned, the capital makes up one important node of the system, but Canberra and Ottawa do not, and Tshwane, Washington and Wellington not quite.

The best corporately connected cities of the world in 2013: index values¹

The Top Ten		Other Cities >0.60	
New York	1.000	Madrid	0.725
Singapore	0.976	Shanghai	0.717
London	0.966	Buenos Aires	0.660
Hong Kong	0.959	Sydney	0.634
Tokyo	0.957	Mexico city	0.633
Beijing	0.849		
Paris	0.847		
Moscow	0.745		
Seoul	0.728		
São Paulo	0.726		

Summing up, while capital cities show a fascinating variety, the great majority of them have major, absolutely non-negligible social, economic and cultural importance in their countries alongside their defining functions as the seat of national power. Furthermore, this broad importance is not in decline. On the contrary, more often than not, it is increasing. In terms of political economy, within any foreseeable future, the world is not going to be run

from supposedly supra-national global cities like New York, Shanghai, Hong Kong or Dubai, but from national capitals: Washington and Beijing, first of all, but also Berlin, Deli, London, Moscow, Paris and Tokyo, and in a longer perspective perhaps also Brasília, Jakarta, Mexico, Seoul and other national capitals. Brussels is likely to remain a place of important decisions, not a supra-national city but as a site of international deal-making and cooperation.

National Symbolism in the Global Era

Are nations and national symbolism losing their meaning in more heterogeneous, multicultural societies? Will national monuments become as invisible as in Robert Musil's *Kakanien*? It might very well happen. I remember driving around with Brazilian friends in Rio twenty years ago, looking at monumental statues, and I was the only one who knew anything about the figures. However, general amnesia is not for a foreseeable future. Berlin is still developing its new national moment, with its semi-resurrected imperial castle and its Humboldt Forum and its plans for a major anti-Communist commemoration. All post-Communist Europe has invested heavily in nationalist and nation-religious iconography as we saw above; Skopje, Macedonia, has indulged in a monumental spree, from Alexander the Great onwards.

Madrid is cleansing the city of the remnants of Francoism. In Washington a very belated African-American museum opened in September 2016. Buenos

Aires, Lima and Santiago are remembering their recent dictatorship and repression. South Africa's Freedom Park is the crown of national iconography worldwide in twenty-first century.

In a number of cities around the world, political urban iconography is still hotly controversial, which is the surest sign of its vitality and meaningfulness. Above, we took note about iconographic controversies in Budapest, Madrid and Kyiv. Other may be added: about the Arab Spring in Cairo's Tahrir Square, Macedonian history in Skopje or whether Ottawa should monumentalize victims of Communism. The *statuemanie* of the Third French Republic is probably Ebbing after its revivals by European Communism and post-Communism. But the interest in public symbolic and museum representations and narratives of national and world history as well as the present clearly remains, and I see no signs of its disappearance any time soon.

¹Ni et al., Global Competitiveness Report 2013, chapter 16.

The Capital of the Early Twenty-First Century

This century is young and will in due course, without doubt, deliver its full capacity of surprises and unexpected turns. But at least for its first fifteen years, the best place to see the opportunities and intertwining of national and global urbanism and the political economy of the early twenty-first century on the display and in interaction has been Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan.

Astana («capital city» in Kazakh) was laid out as a national project of the least nationalist of the former Soviet republics. Like the rest of Soviet Central Asia, the country's cities were predominantly Russian in language and culture. The capital of the republic, Almaty (Russian Alma-Ata, once internationally famous for its fast skating track) was dramatically off-centre in this country the size of Western Europe, now with 17 million inhabitants, in the extreme south, close to the Chinese border. A move of the capital was announced in 1994, motivated by ethno-political as well as geopolitical interests. The ethno-political subtext was to create a Kazakh capital in the center of the country, in the largely Russian-speaking regions.

The capital project was driven by one of the great (and authoritarian) political entrepreneurs of the small countries of the early twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, along with Lee Quan Yew of Singapore, Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia, and Paul Kagame of Rwanda, Nursultan Nazarbayev, the last leader of Soviet Kazakhstan. It was made financially possible by the oil and mineral boom, now ending and casting its shadow over Astana.

On the northern steppe, the nineteenth-century Russian garrison town of Akmolinsk – later the outback Soviet Tselinograd, which Khrushchev once dreamed of as the centre of a solution to the perennial problems of Soviet agriculture – on the river of Ishin (in Kazakh, Esil), a stunning new capital has been constructed in about fifteen years, starting in 1998. The «metabolist» Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa won the international competition for a master plan, which has not played a much of a master role, and it was deliberately intended as a platform for organic growth – in that sense somewhat similar to Doxiadis's conception of Islamabad – not as a city blueprint, like Costa's Plan Piloto for Brasília.* (More important and effective was Kurokawa's emphasis on urban metabolism in prioritizing water and sewage infrastructure and forest belt around the city to placate the harsh climate.)

The government district is laid out in a grand west-east axis with a clear association to the Washington Mall. It starts with a headquarters of the main state oil and gas company, an almost circular building in classical Soviet style, with an archway to the east. A green mall leads you to the central national symbol, the Bayterek, a sleek 105-metre-tall construction

representing a tree with a golden egg (the sun) on the top, taken from an old legend. Then the mall continues, flanked on both sides by long rows of ministerial buildings ending in two golden towers, making the entrance to the next square, with parliament and court buildings on one side, the presidential administration and concert hall on the other, and, at the end of the axis, Ak Orda (the White Camp), the Presidential Palace, under the blue dome looking like double sized Washington White house.

This is monumental nationalism, obviously inspired by both of the superpowers of the Cold War, though to be long gone. There is much more post-Communist nationalism. The concentration camps in Kazakhstan and cruel collectivization famine of the 1930s are remembered. There is a big monumental ensemble to national defenders, with one side referring to World War II and the defence of the USSR against Nazi Germany and the other to Kazakh nomadic warriors against the (Tsarist) Russians. National independence is celebrated by two big monuments: one from 2008, a tall column topped by an eagle, with president Nazarbayev standing at its base. The other from 2011, in the form of a triumphal arc. In good Stalinist tradition, several institutions and buildings are named after the president. Lenin was stowed away in the early 1990s, replaced by the Kazakh poet Abay; Marx and Soviet leaders have disappeared from the streets. Curiously enough, the 1980 Communist leader Dinmukhamed Kunayev, whom Mikhail Gorbachev fired for corruption and unwisely replaced with ethnic Russian (before turning to Nazarbayev), has survived in a major street.

However, this nationalism is only one part of the Astana story. From the beginning the city has simultaneously been conceived as a globalist project, including its own «Special Economic Zone» of corporate tax breaks. Part of the urban nationalism has actually been sub-contracted. The first big mosque, on the government hall (Nur Astana), was a gift from Qatar. The Chamber of Deputies was built by a Turkish firm – Astana is part of the Turkish State Convention for Architecture and Urban Planning – and the Senate building was a gift from Saudi Arabia.

The little river was dammed up and widened up to Thames-Seine proportions, with a riverside promenade. After the first round of national buildings, which left me quite unimpressed on my first visit in 2005, Nazarbaev's Astana has embarked on globalist imagery and iconicity, including seductive image-capitalism offers of «country club villas», an «English quarter» and «Europolis». Norman Foster has been recruited for two big projects. One is a Place of Peace and Reconciliation, a pyramid full of number symbolism which looks much better from afar than close by and inside, as a meeting ground for an inter-religious encumene, one of Nazarbaev's great international projects* (Post-Soviet Kazakhstan is about 70 per cent

Muslim and 25 percent Christian (mainly Orthodox). Other religious are tiny, but a prominent synagogue is included in the new cityscape.). Another, Khan Shatyr, is a standard globalist shopping and entertainment centre, with an indoor pool and a beach of sand from the Maldives inside, spectacular 150-metre-high marquee or transparent tent, closing the governmental axis to the west (across the river from the Presidential Palace). Currently the big building projects are a new commercial centre, Abu Dhabi Plaza, made with Gulf money, and the 2017 World Expo, designed by Chicago firm of Adrian Smith and Gordon Gill.

Astana has come to house a very high number of spectacular post-modernist buildings, most of them for culture and sports. Some of the best have been designed by a local architect, Shokhan Makyabetov, the chief city architect from 2005 to 2007.[†] (My picture of Astana derives first of all from two visits, in 2005 and 2011, which (thanks to the kind collegial help of my two interpreters, Tapani Kaakuriniemi and Larisa Titarenko) included a number of interviews. The literature is not large but includes an excellent architectural guide edited by Philipp Meuser (*Astana: Architectural Guide*, Berlin: DOM, 2015).

What Astana shows in its abundant splendor is, first of all, the possible intervening of national and

global. They remain distinct but are not necessarily incompatible. Above we noted the wisdom of the Asian conception of globalizing as an active verb. To globalize in Asia has been a national choice of political and business leaders. The rulers and architects of Astana have been much more sophisticated than the skyscraper developers of Mexico or Jakarta – precisely for that reason, they demonstrate more convincingly how globalist economics and nationalist political symbolism can coexist.

The Nazarbayev regime is now entering the stormy waters. The long commodities boom has ended and people are obviously quite angry at the new long-term lease of national lands to foreigners, protesting in the spring of 2016. The typical post-Communist turn to religion has not prevented the emergence of militant Islamism. Whether the World Expo of 2017 will make Astana into a «global city» looks increasingly uncertain. However, Astana has become part of world urbanism. True, Almaty remains the economic and cultural capital of Kazakhstan, but Astana has grown into a social fact. According to the 2014 census it had 835 000 inhabitants, up from about 250 000 in 1980s and two-thirds are Kazakhs instead of one-sixth. The city is not likely to disappear with regime change. It will remain an architectural monument.

Globalism and the Future of the People

The future of globalism, of skyscrapers as well as of global corporations, looks pretty sure and well laid out: continuing and, most probably, increasing in impact. The main difficult question is the future of the people. Will the *people* have the future in the world of ruthless global capitalism? Almost a lifetime of political commitment, observation and analysis has taught me not to expect anything inclusive and egalitarian from unbridled capitalism, and that rebellions are impossible to predict – but that they do occur again and again.

In fact, I think there are two reasons for moderate optimism about the prospects of future popular moments.

One is the recent return of popular urban revolutions. The international costs of national repression have increased and are likely to stay high. Such revolutions or regime changes by popular street protests will remain unlikely in consolidated electoral democracies, but there they might mutate into movement-parties successfully playing the electoral game. Recent southern European embryonic examples show that such scenario is not beyond the pale of political realism. Outside countries with intact constitution and electoral legitimacy, repetitions of recent successful uprisings will happen again and might very well spread in sub-Saharan Africa, where armed violence has so far decided most contested political outcomes.

The other is the possibility of urban reformism. It was pioneered by European «municipal socialism», but in recent times the main thrust of radical socially transformative urban reformism has come from the Global South, with long-term input in Montevideo and Mexico City and recent breakthroughs in Delhi and Jakarta. It is a very vulnerable project, dependent on the national economy, often under pressure of hostile national government and facing the volatile metropolitan electorate, now that the historically stable European working-class base is largely done. But it should not be forgotten «that its major achievements in the South are of this century». A tri-continental multiplication of the projects of AMLO, Jokowi and Kejriwal is certainly not impossible.

After Ken Livingstone's first mayoralty? Euro-American urban politics has been much more cautious; Euro-American city governments are usually boxed in by superior state governments. What will come out of, for instance, Manuela Carmena's government of Madrid remains to be seen. However, the possibility of social change is not to be ruled out. Ordinary people are not going away. They will continue to disturb the visions of global image capitalism. Their chances of social transformation are better in the cities than elsewhere – and for urban social change, capital cities of power turned into cities of transformation are likely to be decisive.