

ESSAY
**MEGACITIES:
GOING DEEPER, BUILDING SAFER
ON THEME**

MEGACITY – HOME FOR GLOBAL CITIZEN?

City is body. She has her veins as streets. She has her eyes with different eye shadows as the windows of houses. She has the mouth as the editorial office of daily newspaper and speaks rumors in tabloids. She has her hands as hoisting engines. She has her legs as railways. She has her fragile, old heart in the middle of crossroads.

City is smoking. We can notice it if we have a look on chimneys of factories. City is tired when traffic jam takes place. City is always awake. She is awake far into night. She plays with cars, men and women, lights, planes and drugs. She is spoiled girl. She is growing up all the time. She is too light-minded.

But everybody loves her. With special kind of love – the feeling of belonging. City – it is home. And today – city is becoming home for everybody, including you, me and they. We are global citizens. Sometimes, against our will.

Megacity. In past, present or future?

If I close my eyes, I see some shots of Luc Besson movie *'The Fifth Element'* (1998) where actor Bruce Willis is living in special apartment in city where one can travel not only by tram, by bus or by metro but also by special flying cars. It is city which is constructed in many levels. Space and place had lost the real sense of time. We are living in the century of active, fast and irreversible changes.

In spite of this futuristic vision we can find this idea about appearance of megacity in the past also. The image of megacity which is made for futuristic movies existed not only in the end of 20th century in Bessons' mind but already in the beginning of 20th century in the silent science fiction movie *'Metropolis'* (1927) made by Fritz Lang.

This film is set in the year 2026, in the extraordinary skyscrapers of a corporate city-state called *Metropolis*. Society has been divided into two rigid groups:

one of planners or thinkers, who live high above the earth in luxury, and another of workers who live underground toiling to sustain the lives of the privileged.

There we can see the same system of constructing big, modern city by using technocratic power over people if we don't pay attention to motif. It is sad to realize but I have to say that we are living the same way nowadays – there are idea producers and people who turns this idea into product.

On one hand it makes me think that soon we won't be concerned about democracy or human rights because instead of democracy there will be technocracy. The term 'technocracy' comes from the Greek *tekhne* for skill and from the Greek *kratos* for power. It is a government or organizational system where decision makers are usually highly skilled in fields of management or any other field. A technocratic government therefore is a government by experts.

In the case of megacity I would like to use term 'technocracy' as organizational system where decision makers are technologies, machines, robots. Citizens of megacities will be dependent on that how works traffic, how works computers, how works their machines. It is already here - the power of technologies over us, over our lifestyle, over our way of communication.

Global citizen – no passports and lost identities.

The key words of megacity for me are estrangement, urbanization and multiculturalism. Boundaries between nations, cultures, genders, places, cities, regions, values are blurry. We can't separate them. We are becoming the citizens of this Global Village with an image of androgen person.

I think the concept 'identity' is the most complicated nowadays. Modern technologies and communication channels give possibility to exist in world with many identities, nicknames, different life histories no matter where you are living. It makes the existence of individual much more complicated because of different roles and characters which it recognizes as its own.

I presume that cultural variability is influenced by modern world including modern technologies, global network, online world, free migration. People are products of many cultures at the same time. It means that I can sit in my dormitory room in Finland, studying at my home University in Latvia taking online courses, shopping in USA online bookstore, wearing clothes which were made in China, drinking coffee from Brazil, listening to the music band from Iceland, watching

Olympic Games in TV, speaking through *Skype* with my Russian friend in German, reading poems of Lorca in Spanish and so on.

International, multicultural and global person – fusion of cultural ingredients. We can't attribute any cultural shape to anyone because we consist of many influences. We are becoming ourselves in interaction with other people and world around us.

Feminine megacity.

Who is that woman which I can see in the mirror every morning after waking up? Is she young active European woman or still the same soviet heritage woman from that time when my home country Latvia was a part of Soviet Union? I think they are both in me. There is already European one and there is still Soviet one. If we take a close look to them we can realize that there isn't big difference in their lifestyle. The biggest difference is the attitude to this kind of women who lead such lifestyle.

Woman who lived in Soviet Union was a mother and leader in her occupation. She was trying to unite these both roles. The biggest problem was that collective success was on the first place. Individual success and satisfaction such as successful family life and inner happiness take the second place. It can be explained because of the political system - socialism where this kind of woman lived.

Nowadays it has changed. Woman is becoming more and more self-dependent and self-sufficient. It is quit often when we can meet this kind of woman who has her child without being married or without living with men at all. And it is not a shame to live this way of life. It is common situation.

Nowadays, we are living mostly in capitalist system. Women tend to be successful like individual leaders without collective success. But again there is one more similarity with Soviet times. Again – increasingly - career takes the first place in women's life. Family is phenomenon which can wait.

I would like to point out that there is a big pressure from mass media nowadays, that show an image of happy woman, her way of life and things that are required to get happier. If we take the magazine for women there will be articles about how to improve their shape, style, career, sexual life, mood, how to be independent and at the same time how to find rich and successful men because she has to be with successful men to be a happy woman.

Mass media gives us a portrait of 21st century's women. She is a beautiful mother with big salary (preferable the same as men), with good psychotherapist who helps her to solve her problems, and with a lot of time that she spends with her friends. We can find this woman. But I think only on the cover of magazine. Because it is impossible to be a good mother and successful leader at the same time. They achieve a lot in their lives but still miss something. Maybe this 'something' we can find in being a feminine woman... If it is possible in this kind of living conditions, in the rush of our everyday life.

Archipelago of lonely hearts.

I think that almost every country in Europe nowadays is individualistic oriented. We can see it if we have a look in world of advertising, in headlines of mass media where we can see success stories, rich and famous people and their lives. These rich, famous and powerful people are evaluated as important, as noticeable and as influential people. The 'small daily person' is not worth of attention but he/she always can try to become rich, famous or powerful. To reach this aim they have to be smart, to work hard and to do the best for their own needs. Bigger city, bigger feeling of loneliness.

Everything what people are doing today developing technologies is to make a life easier. It is very complicated to predict what will happen next day, next month or next year. It is almost impossible to imagine what will be in 2015. Scholars say that there will be sixty megacities with 600 million people living there.

I can't imagine living in megacity. I am from country where population is only 2.4 millions people, from Latvia. It is just a half of population of megacity (if we think that megacity is city with 5 million inhabitants). I would like to point out that

I think media and technological convergence will lead to society in which people won't have communication skills in real world. Maybe my attitude towards this kind of communication is very pessimistic but I am against society where everyone is sitting in front of computer and telling in chat room about his/her big loneliness.

I would like to avoid a life as big ocean of information where everybody lives on their own island and never goes to other islands. I am afraid of this kind of archipelago in future. Especially in megacities.

Peace-pipes are sold! How about tickets to Mind Cage?

Open your eyes. Open your senses. Look, so many grey apartment houses like jails. The last Indians sell their reservation to businessmen in black - white suits which remain me penguins. Indians are going to live in these apartment houses but peace-pipe smoking is not allowed there. They sell peace-pipes also. To people who are fighting somewhere in Iraq without knowing the real reasons – why?

We are tired. We are tired of speed in which planet Earth is rotating nowadays. We are tired from lack of real face-to-face communication. We are tired of slogans which break into our lives from advertisements around us. We are speaking clichés which we remember from mass media. We are wearing labels on us. We are hiding or trying to find our identities under nicknames. We don't remember the date of our friends' birthdays because instead of it we have to remember pin codes, passwords and bank account numbers.

I am going down the street. I notice shop with signboard 'The House of Happiness'. I am going inside. 'You can buy here the ticket to the Cage,' seller explains me. To the Cage?!? Yes, yes, to the Cage. It is the most popular trip nowadays, he said. You can take the ticket on credit and go there. And pay back your debt the rest of your life.

City is binding us. She requires fast way of live. We can't find time to stop for looking into each other eyes. We have to go. Where? To the future.

Maybe soon we will write on envelopes not postal index but coordinates of meridians and parallels because there won't be borders, customs, boundaries. Maybe not. Because people don't write letters anymore. They prefer e-mails. Without stamps, handwriting and waiting. In spite of it I am sending postcards from every place which I am visiting. And I know that somewhere someone is waiting for them. As long as it will be so, I will know where my home is.