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**During the 1980s, American urban areas have experienced rapid change associated with expansion of activities by multinational and multilocal corporations, shifts in the significance of new communications technologies, and the residential and locational preferences of people and organizations. These processes have led to a restructuring of the American city that has major implications for many metropolitan universities. This article presents recommendations for revising the missions of metropolitan universities to account for these changes.**

# University and City

## *From Urban to Metropolitan*

America and its cities are again in transition. Since 1970, there have been sweeping changes in the position we occupy in the world political economy, and this has had major implications for the ways in which we organize our lives in cities. International trade is dominated by corporations that are at once multinational and multilocal. Their operations and interests span a globe that is linked by instantaneous visual and oral communications. Computer networks such as BITNET allow immediate transfer of information internationally. It is now possible through satellite communications to link computer processors on different continents so that they can work on the same problem at the same time. Problems are now solved in telecommunications-based meetings of top professionals housed in sites as disparate as Tokyo, New York, and Edinburgh.

### *American Cities*

These and other world and national trends have had their impact on the organization of American life and especially on the structure of American cities. It is no longer reasonable to think of American cities as merely urban; they are best typified as metropolitan. To be sure, our cities have urban cores, but the core is not the city. The City (writ large) is a variegated, segmented, highly differentiated region composed of core, suburbs, exurbs, and satellite cities that are all interlinked with one another in a host of mutually interdependent, symbiotic relationships. This has been true of most large cities since widespread use of

the automobile began in the 1920s. What has happened most recently are changes in the organization and location of production; shifts in technologies of communication and transportation; and the evolution of rapidly changing, highly complex technologies and their applications across the economy, leading to rapid transformations in the fundamental nature of the symbiotic relationships both within the elements of a particular metropolitan area and between the metropolitan area and outside elements.

It is the thesis of this article that these changes in the nature of our urban areas require a rethinking of the role and positioning of many of our urban institutions of higher education: their missions should be recast in terms of the educational needs of metropolitan areas. Furthermore, it will be argued that the historical missions of urban universities are not in conflict with this notion of metropolitanism; but instead, the term "urban" designates a focus on a subset of metropolitan issues. In this regard, it is most important that we not abandon the inner city or the problems facing it. Recent research on American cities has provided ample evidence that rhetorically defined "center city problems" are misconceptualized; these issues are typical of many portions of our urban areas (including many suburbs). Moreover, the causes and "cures" for many center city ills can only be addressed within the broader context of the functioning of the entire metropolitan area.

### *Metropolitan and Urban*

Americans tend to think of urban areas as being composed of politically differentiated communities. Decisions are often made within a particular political jurisdiction without regard to the needs or interests of people who live in communities on their boundaries. Older central cities such as Chicago, New York, Cincinnati, or St. Louis have great difficulty maintaining a tax base to pay for the urban services demanded both by their residents and commuters who inhabit the cities during working hours. More recently, central cities have found that their economic base has continued to erode and that even the commuters no longer come in the same numbers. In the South and West, center cities are often choked in a transportation circulation noose in which residents commute from one suburb to another for employment and entertainment, leaving the center to disadvantaged and minorities.

To fully understand the processes and needs of today's cities, it is important to focus on the entire metropolitan region, which is composed of at least one central city (there may be more than one) and the hinterland with which it is interdependent. Cities and their surrounding territories are so socially, politically, and economically

intertwined that shifts in living patterns, employment, locations of businesses, shopping patterns, or other major changes in any one part can affect the conditions and future of all other parts. While there is general agreement as to the importance of metropolitan regions, there is much less consensus among social scientists as to exactly which variables should be highlighted in creating formal definitions of a metropolitan region's boundaries. However, most social scientists have focused on definitions that emphasize the functional unity and interdependence of the various cities, suburbs, and other components that constitute a metropolis.

Since 1970, there have been several major trends that have typified the evolution of American cities; each of these trends has had a significant impact on the ways in which cities function:

1. *Many of the nation's largest metropolitan areas, especially in highly industrialized regions, are losing population at a rapid rate.* For example, the New York metropolitan area suffered a net out-migration of more than 50,000 people between 1980 and 1987, while the Detroit area lost more than 300,000. Loss of population in these areas has tended to exacerbate problems associated with a declining tax base, spreading blight, and an increase in the percentage of the population who are unable to support themselves.

2. *Urban populations have been shifting particularly to middle-size and smaller metropolitan areas, to metropolitan areas in the South and West, and to nonmetropolitan residences.* Between 1980 and 1986, there was a 7.4 percent increase in the number of Americans living in metropolitan areas. During the first seven years of the decade, the largest metropolitan areas (those with over 2.5 million residents) had grown by approximately 5.5 million people, compared to a growth of more than 9.2 million for smaller areas. This growth has been differentially distributed so that, while the metropolitan population in the Midwest and Northeast has grown slightly, there are rapid increases in the South and West. For example, the Miami-Ft. Lauderdale area grew by approximately 237,000, the San Francisco area by 269,000, and Dallas-Ft. Worth by over 500,000.

3. *Within metropolitan areas, people have continued the process of suburbanization.* More urban Americans live outside center cities than reside within them. The trend toward lower density suburban housing, despite the rehabilitation and gentrification of some inner city neighborhoods, shows no sign of abating.

4. *Although suburbs are stereotyped as havens for the white middle class; suburbs are highly differentiated, housing the wealthy, middle classes, workers, and the poor and ethnic minori-*

ties. Outlying areas of metropolitan regions are highly differentiated in terms of population characteristics, economic development, and growth potential. It would be a great mistake to consider the growth of the suburbs to be a white-only phenomenon. In 1980, blacks represented 5.9 percent (over 5.91 million people) of the suburban population while people of Spanish origin constituted over 5.1 percent (approximately 5.11 million people). Recent research further suggests that the rate of growth of the black suburban population is greater than or equal to that of the white population.

5. *There is a significant increase in the number of individuals living alone and a continuing decline in the average size of households across metropolitan areas.* Nationally, it has been estimated that one in four households located in American metropolitan areas is composed of a single individual. In San Francisco, which is something of a unique case, over half of all adults report living alone. This trend is the result of both population aging and changing norms governing marriage and divorce. In addition, the number of two person households and households headed by single individuals who have children is also increasing.

6. *Corporations and other businesses continue to decentralize and deconcentrate their operations so that more and more activities are developing in peripheral areas.* The number of corporate headquarters leaving New York exceeded those moving in by a ratio of 4 to 1. Many of the relocatees were moving to peripheral locations in adjoining areas. Nationally, in 1982, the majority of retail establishments and nearly half of all taxable service industries and wholesale establishments found in metropolitan areas were located outside the central city.

7. *Development across various segments of metropolitan areas is very uneven; industrial suburbs, older employing and residential suburbs, and many satellite cities are being bypassed by development.* While there is clearly a trend to peripheral development of metropolitan areas, this trend is highly uneven. Many of the problems historically associated with decline of the central city (including an eroding tax base, high building vacancy rates, high unemployment and underemployment, rapid increases in violent crime, and the spread of slums) are typical of older, industrial, and blue collar areas outside the metropolitan core. As John Stahura has shown in his extensive research on suburbs, the status of particular suburbs tends to persist for decades. Thus, industrialized suburbs and satellite cities that once boomed on the periphery of older metropolitan areas such as Cincinnati, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Boston, St. Louis, and Detroit, are now as blighted

as any center city. Like many center cities, they have been passed over by developers and are suffering stagnation and economic decline.

The causes of these changes in the structure of American cities can be attributed to many factors. The most important among them are discussed in the following paragraphs.

*Decline in the importance of transportation networks as determiners of location, due to changes in communications technologies.* Historically, ease of access to major population centers and nearness to a radial transportation network within a metropolitan area were some of the most critical factors in determining where a business or other employer would locate. Because of the widespread use of telecommunications and the wide, nearly universal, access to automobiles, many functions that previously had to cluster together in order to work, now can be located more diffusely. Manuel Castells argues that this shift is so pervasive that we need to reconceptualize the functional and economic aspects of metropolitan areas "from a space of localities to a space of flows." Communications technologies have allowed us and our activities to flow across what were previous barriers and boundaries and to restructure our thinking about our cities, places, and ways of life.

*Persistent consumer preferences for low density and smaller location, due to changes in communications technologies.* Quite simply, where people have a choice, they tend to relocate in smaller and less crowded places. This preference has given rise to both the suburbanization of American metropolitan areas and the more recent shift away from the largest American cities.

*The increasing significance of multilocal corporations, which are integrated into national and international networks.* As has been noted by Christopher D. Ross: "Clearly the network of metropolitan... relations is evolving in response to organizational changes taking place within corporations as they adapt to a variety of new constraints and opportunities, as well as to ecological [human land use] changes occurring at the metropolitan, regional, and national levels." ["Organizational Dimensions of Metropolitan Dominance: Prominence of the Network of Corporate Control, 1955-1975," *American Sociological Review*, 52 (April 1987) p. 265.]

The forces that shape America's cities have changed, as have the shapes of the cities themselves. In terms of their impact on higher education, these transformations suggest that new modes of thinking about our institutions and their missions are in order.

### *Metropolitanization of the University*

The metropolitan character of American cities has significant implications for higher education and especially for many of the universities that consider themselves urban. Focus on metropolitanism does not require abandonment of an urban mission or de-emphasis of critical urban issues. Instead, metropolitanization allows reconceptualization of the possible causes and solutions for these problems.

Historically, urban universities have had particular concern for issues of minority and nontraditional student access, economic and social development, the need for general and professional education, applied and basic research, and service (remunerated or not) that benefitted the local area. Under the metropolitan rubric, all of these issues are of major importance as the university reconceptualizes its role with regard to its place in the city, state, nation, and international scene. The term "urban university" has generally implied a central city focus with an emphasis on access, job-related professional education, and applied as well as basic research. Yet, the need for educational intervention transcends this limited focus and circumscribed political boundary. Suburban minorities (more than ten million people) require access; poverty in the suburbs is still a travesty; suburban and satellite city blight is as persistent as any in a central city, and employers on the periphery require trained personnel as much as do those who are more centrally located. We may be much better served if we recast these issues as human problems of our urban society rather than the unique problem of a particular political jurisdiction.

Reconceptualizing the mission of universities as metropolitan speaks to the need for inclusiveness in defining the problems with which we will deal. Far from abandoning the issues defined by an urban focus, metropolitanization recognizes the interdependencies among the various elements of our cities that may ultimately lead to solution of their problems. The concept of metropolitanism brings our academic focus in line with the realities of city structure: we are bound together in networks of social, economic, and political symbiotic relationships. We are not likely to solve the problems of the central city until we adequately define how that city is linked to other portions of its metropolitan area and to other cities, regions, and nations.

***The causes and "cures" for many center city ills can be addressed only within the broader context of the entire metropolitan area.***

The term "metropolitan" is in common use in the literature on cities. It denotes an entire urbanized region that is functionally linked to other urban areas, regions of the country, and international zones. To adequately service a metropolitan population, metropolitan universities must cast their future with an eye to linkages, both national and international. Key decisions that affect the future of the local area are increasingly being made in other cities and often in other countries. To accept the role for metropolitan education requires increased attention to international education and to the examination of broad systemic conditions that may entail a world socioeconomic system that transcends any one nation.

This broader canvas of metropolitanism also establishes the backdrop for reconceptualizing universities' roles in social and economic development. As was noted by Sheila Kaplan, universities are involved in whole community development, not merely economic development. To improve the quality of life, provide cultural activities, give access to education, and provide direct technological and educational support for the entire metropolitan area, not merely a segment of it, is to enhance the economic development potential of the entire area. But more importantly, the notion of metropolitanism focuses the university on full-fledged human development, not merely on the economy. Thus, it logically ties together the long tradition of American higher education as the molder of the human spirit and the mission of the metropolitan university.

Finally, there is a second great tradition of American higher education that is reemphasized by the notion of a metropolitan university. In the early 1900s, the University of Chicago established the importance of the tie between higher education and the city. In his seminal work, Robert Park in 1915 defined the significance of the city as a natural laboratory for the study of human behavior. It is in the city, with its full complement of humanity, that we gain a more complete understanding of human nature and behavior. So, too, the metropolitan university draws its life from the people of the urban system that it serves. A metropolitan university is not merely a university *in* a city, it is *of* the city. Its focus is on the total educational needs of its area and the interlinkages of those needs with the changing and shifting conditions in the world at large.

### *Suggested Readings*

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