

Urban Regions and Globalization: A Trans-Atlantic Comparison

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Edge cities

I was one of those Europeans who went on a fact-finding tour in America in the summer of 1998. The former mayor of Rotterdam, Dr. Abram Peper (who is now state secretary of the interior) asked me to visit some 10 American cities with the purpose of finding out the opinions of municipal politicians, their civil servants, urban planners, and economists about how to deal with the economic and socio-cultural development of inner cities as well as the edge cities that are developing beyond the boundaries of the suburbs. We believed that the revitalizing inner cities, the changing suburbs, and the emerging edge cities engaged in a competitive struggle. We were of the opinion also that in this competition crucial retail functions would be sapped away from the inner cities to the suburbs, and from there to the edge cities. Although the Netherlands exhibits an entirely different scale (scarcity of land, of course, is Holland's benchmark), similar processes can be observed here, and Dr. Peper considered these very harmful for future developments in Dutch as well as most other European cities. It was with this rather broad hypothesis, then, that I visited inner cities, suburbs, and edge cities, and conducted interviews with knowledgeable informants in New York City, Philadelphia, Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, San Francisco, Seattle, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Boston, and Washington, D. C. Besides these cities I was also able to visit and inspect various suburbs and edge cities.

For the sake of clarity, I use the concept edge city to indicate areas designed and established by developers and located alongside interstate highways or at the crossings of such freeways. Often an edge city

originates with the construction of a fairly large mall with a consistent pattern: megastores like Macy's, Sears, Nordstrom, and J. C. Penney at the four corners of the mall with smaller shops along the galleries between them.

In the vicinity of these malls are high-rise office buildings that usually exhibit a playful, post-modern look. Corporations from the ITC banking sectors often set up their headquarters or subsidiary offices here, since space restrictions are minimal and the prices of land and rent still relatively low. Also commonly located in this vicinity are large hotels and residences, although some edge cities seemed to suggest that citizens and private homes were not the developers' prime concern. Developers tend to think primarily in terms of the number of square feet available for offices and hotels. For this reason, it was my impression that calling these places "cities" was quite incorrect. Often, these edge cities are located far away from inhabited, urban areas. Driving to them by car, their offices and hotels seem to loom up from nowhere.

I found the looseness of the term city, as it is used in America, to be quite remarkable. It is primarily an administrative, not a sociological concept. When in a region a few thousand inhabitants want administrative autonomy—home rule—they can send a legal petition to their state authorities. Upon adjudication, the community is incorporated and allowed to function as an administratively autonomous municipality. No matter how small, it will then be known as a city or town. The same is actually true of most edge cities I visited. Most of them cannot be called cities or towns sociologically, and I failed to

see a single one that exhibited a trace of urbanity, of urban culture. Sometimes, attempts are made to intimate some sort of urbanity, but the results are often bizarre.

In his fairly popular book on edge cities, Joel Garreau (Garreau 1991) argues that what we are encountering here is a "new frontier." The call for a socio-cultural and economic revitalization of inner cities is, he believes, old-fashioned and quite out of date. According to him, true development and progress lie beyond the cities and the suburbs, and are to be found in these edge cities which, moving to the beat of the present post-modern times, emerge alongside the freeways of America. By and large, urbanity is something that belongs in a museum. This sounds exciting, but the reality of the edge cities I have visited is much less exciting. People will no doubt be working hard in those office buildings (and maybe in the hotel rooms as well), but they do not really live in these edge cities. Even if residential neighborhoods are built in these edge cities, they do not resemble a truly new frontier. Instead, they look rather like the traditional suburbs of the 1950s and 1960s.

Edge cities lack any trace of urbanity. They sap economic power from the cities and—this ought to be stressed—from the suburbs in particular. The malls in the edge cities draw retail functions away from the suburbs and the inner cities. The offices and hotels also draw tax revenues and economic spin-offs away from the inner cities. Yet, one should not jump to hasty conclusions in this regard. If the inner cities manage to maintain an attractive degree of urbanity—excellent ethnic restaurants, fine shops and boutiques, department stores, scores of cultural provisions, and artistic events—they can usually manage to keep the retail functions needed to maintain their residential functions.

Someone in Seattle told me that the inner city was reconstructed as one open-air super-mall, where shopping is more than just buying goods and services. It is infinitely more exciting and stimulating than strolling along in a roofed-over, air-conditioned, super-mall. In fact, the argument could be turned around.

Northeast of Seattle is Redmond, a pleasant little town of 40,000 inhabitants, famous because it accommodates Microsoft's headquarters. A well-to-do town (especially due to its property tax revenues), Redmond is attempting to develop some degree of urbanity. But, of course, urbanity, i.e., urban culture, needs more than money to develop; it also takes time, since culture (and thus urban culture too) needs several years, if not decades, to grow and develop. The poet T. S. Eliot expressed this point nicely, when he likened the development of culture to the making of a coat: it starts with grass that is needed to feed the sheep, which provide the wool, which goes into the yarn that is needed to make the coat. Meanwhile, where do the young and intelligent men and women working at Microsoft go when they spend their leisure time? Eventually they go to indeed beautiful, exciting downtown Seattle, where the good restaurants, cinemas, concert, and opera performances are. The downtown area, by the way, is gaining in popularity as the place to live. Although I have no precise statistical data that will be sufficiently convincing, an interesting about-face of an old pattern may be taking place: working in suburbia and living in the inner city. After all, in the contemporary, flexible workplace, this pattern would be quite feasible. With the personal computer, the Internet, e-mail, telephone, and fax, there is no urgent need to be in an office five days of the week. Much work in the post-industrial society can be done just as effectively and efficiently at home. So why not live in an inner city?

Revitalized Inner Cities

In various cities I visited, people were convinced that despite surrounding edge cities, economic facilities would remain in and be maintained by the inner cities, as long as these inner cities could be kept socially and culturally diverse and lively. Tourists, for instance, visit downtown Philadelphia, San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, etc.—not an edge city located in the middle of nowhere.

I found the recent developments at St. Paul impressive and enlightening. Not long ago it was seen as a sleepy Minneapolis suburb. That was before an energetic mayor and his staff started working closely

with the business community. In an association which would become known as the "Capital City Partnership," a master plan for the reconstruction of the downtown area was created. Formerly-neglected sites along the Mississippi, for instance, are now becoming the center of attention—a fact that should give the city a radical face-lift. An impressive video presentation utilizing virtual reality techniques, shows the St. Paul of the future bearing a strong resemblance to Paris locations along the Seine, but without losing any of St. Paul's own domestic flavor. With the help of this plan, I was told, the strong and respected mayor of St. Paul managed to convince a large software company not to move its new headquarters outside of the inner city. Its new offices are presently under construction in the center of this dynamic city. Residential accommodations are also being developed. The inner city is one huge construction site now, but will doubtless be an example of imaginative and creative urban revitalization in the near future. As a result, there will be less need to fear the effects of the nearby gigantic Mall of America.

My tour once again showed me how crucial a mayor's role in all of this is. Time and again I was told how important it is to have an energetic, visionary, "strong" mayor at the head of municipal administration—someone who is also taken seriously in higher administrative bodies, such as those in the county, state, and federal government. Yet, a strong mayor also depends on a good relationship with the urban business community. If this community respects and admires the mayor, it will unleash its often remarkable energies and intelligent powers to deal with scores of projects which are set up to improve and strengthen the economic and socio-cultural conditions of the city. I was duly impressed by the civic responsibility and civic participation exhibited by the younger men and women populating the business communities of the various cities I visited. And the fact that they took this responsibility so much for granted impressed me even more! Such public-private partnerships are indeed inspiring models for the economic and socio-cultural revitalization of European cities, and particularly their downtown areas.

Edge cities pose a larger problem than drawing retail functions away from inner cities. I am referring to sprawl: a rather careless, largely unplanned use of land which greatly stimulates the use of cars and claims large areas of natural environment. Why is this occurring? Several of my informants blamed the abundance of space in America, some of them even adding that in this respect, the Dutch should be glad that their land is so scarce and their population so dense. After all, these limitations coerce Dutch authorities to impose much stricter regulations associated with national land use policies.

American developers enjoy much more freedom than their Dutch colleagues when it comes to buying large pieces of land, laying out the needed infrastructure, and constructing office buildings, hotels, and malls that are often so gigantic. Extensive residential settlements are sometimes constructed in areas that recently have still been parts of nature. Often, such residential settlements are constructed without much prior planning. Tysons Corner outside Washington, D. C. presents a good example of this. It impressed me as a chaotic and inhospitable piece of urban sprawl. Nevertheless, I should add that there are also fine examples of developments which were carefully planned and constructed by responsible developers. In this sense, Columbia, southwest of Baltimore, comes to mind. This is a project of many years' standing, designed and executed by a visionary and idealistic developer, Jim Rouse. His vision of an edge city was one in which economic, socio-cultural and ecological dimensions would be integrated. His prime focus was not on square feet of office space, but on how people could be enabled to live, work, and spend their leisure time in this settlement. In a strict sense of the word, Columbia is not an edge city. It actually consists of 10 small villages which appear to the Dutch visitor as being rural courtyards, each having its own entrance and bearing its own name. Lining the curving asphalt roads are pleasant twin singles (two dwellings under one roof). Nevertheless, Columbia also contributes to sprawl and irresponsible land use, and it is typical of the 1950s and 1960s suburban look. In other words, it lacks any trace of urbanity, and struck me as a rather arti-

ficial place: a bit like artificial flowers that look deceptively natural but lack any fragrance and feel dead to the touch.

In most cities I visited during my fact-finding tour in June 1998, concerted effort was being made to revitalize downtown areas—not just economically, but socially and culturally as well. One of my informants called this process the “suburbanization of the inner city,” with the inner city becoming a kind of comfortable, friendly village. At the same time, he added, suburbs are undergoing rapid urbanization since they are no longer merely residential locations. People are increasingly living and working in the suburbs surrounding large cities. Some corporations, for example, have moved their headquarters from Manhattan to Stamford, Connecticut where office space is cheaper and the people who work there will not have so far to commute. Actually suburbs are rapidly including more metropolitan features, one of them being the inevitable rise of crime (which, incidentally, is tending to decline in revitalized inner cities). This process, then, might well herald a significant change in the urban landscape of America: the suburbs, changing in character and scope, will develop into satellite cities in relation to the revitalized inner cities.

Great differences exist, however, between central cities and their downtowns on the one hand, and their satellite cities that usually lack an economically and socio-culturally vibrant downtown area on the other hand. A vital urban center has a wide assortment of museums, concert halls and theaters, cinemas, galleries, art studios, boutiques, restaurants, department stores, and so on. Then, too, an urban center is also characterized by the coexistence of vice and virtue. Prostitutes, urban nomads, as they are called these days, drug addicts, are as much part of urban life, as are artists, intellectuals, priests, and businessmen. In fact, it’s quite possible for a city to be too clean. Take today’s Singapore, for example, or tomorrow’s New York City if Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has his way. A sterile city is as devoid of urbanity as is a city that is smothered in dirt and filth. (In this regard, I was honestly shocked by the present state of San Francisco’s inner city that seemed to have

fallen prey to social deterioration.) A crucial component of urbanity is socio-economic, socio-cultural, and demographic differentiation, which, although not always easy to deal with, certainly does offer tension and excitement. Indeed, if an inner city possesses sufficient urbanity, it’s an exciting place to be. This is more than can be said of a suburb, even if it’s evolved into a satellite city. In any case, the central cities of America are no longer the exclusive domains of social problems and urban blight. Increasingly, they are also the socio-cultural biotope of young, single professionals, young couples without children, and senior citizens whose children have left their homes. Naturally, inner cities with a vibrant urbanity are just the places that attract tourists.

There is reason to see the relationship between inner cities and suburbs as competitive. Unlike inner cities, most suburbs are suitable residential locations for families with children, since suburbs offer a greater number of affordable housing units, more parks, better schools, and better opportunities for “compact shopping” in their malls. Nevertheless, even if a suburb evolves into a satellite city and tries to develop its own inner city with its own assortment of cultural facilities, it will have a hard time acquiring the degree of urbanity that traditional inner cities possess. After all, it takes quite some time for vital urbanity to emerge.

What cannot be denied is that retail functions are shifting their locations somewhat away from the inner cities to the suburbs and satellite cities, and from there to the super malls of the edge cities. The moving of large corporations from the inner cities to satellite cities, suburbs, and edge cities also entails a sizeable loss of property taxes for the central cities. If, on the other hand, inner cities and their surrounding suburbs and satellite cities manage to bolster their existing urbanity as well as to improve their living and working conditions, and if they also manage to develop these in a complementary manner, the competition need not become self-defeating.

As to the edge cities, only a few informants believed them to be a real threat to the central cities, the satellite cities, and the suburbs. They are actually a bigger threat to the environment. Some even said

they believe that most edge cities would become known in coming decades as examples of urban planning disasters. Instead of being the "new frontier," as Joel Garreau believes, edge cities could become the ghost towns of the 21st century.

Urban Regionalism

Meanwhile, another issue is appearing high on the agenda at current debates about central cities, satellite cities, suburbs, and edge cities. This is regionalism—that is, ideas and policies in terms of larger urban regions. Again and again during my fact-finding tour, I heard that the present economic, political, and socio-cultural globalization was making it necessary to start practicing urban-regional cooperation as soon as possible. In other words, we should no longer be thinking, speaking, and acting in terms of separate and competing systems (downtown, suburb, satellite city, edge city) when it comes to developing our policies, but rather in terms of larger, interdependent, integrated, regional networks that maintain strategic alliances with other, comparable metropolitan regions, or, if need be, compete with them fiercely. In the corporate world organizations are also more and more moving beyond mergers and takeovers. Instead, they would rather collaborate in flexible, interconnected, strategic alliances, even with (components of) former competitors if this would prove advantageous and profitable for all parties. Seattle, for instance, is the central city in a rather large metropolitan region that has an explicit regional identity. This identity bears the heavy imprint of the Boeing factories and the Microsoft headquarters. This urban region needs to have the power and authority to operate within an increasingly globalized market, either competing in a traditional way, or cooperating in strategic alliances in a more post-modern fashion.

What Jane Jacobs (Jacobs 1986) said about cities in *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, applies both today and in the coming decades to urban and metropolitan regions: these regions (not the individual central cities) will be the proper sources and creators of the wealth of nations. Moreover, if an urban region is economically and socio-culturally vital, its

reach and radius of influence will extend beyond its own limits and even the limits of its nation. The 21st century will no longer be a century of the nation-states, as the 19th and 20th centuries have been; it will be the century of the urban and metropolitan regions. This is not the end of the nation-state, as is sometimes argued. The 21st century will rather exhibit a shift of power and authority from the nation-state to the urban and metropolitan region. Journalist Neal Peirce (Peirce, et al 1993) is quite explicit in this respect. He has called the metropolitan regions citistates; these are becoming the prime supports and power sources of national economies: "...national economies are, in fact, constellations of regional economies, each with a major city at its core, each requiring specific and customized strategies."

The American debates on regionalism have little to do with "ethno-regions" such as Wales, Scotland, or Basque. Indeed, we should keep in mind the simple fact that such regions are not functioning as the actual cores of economically, socio-culturally, and politically idiosyncratic regions; instead, economic life is organized within regions centered on cities like Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Bilbao. The future will belong to these urban regions, not to rather traditional ethno-regions.

In any case, the American debates on urban (metropolitan) regions are of great relevance to Europe. European history has demonstrated that it is easy for regions to develop into ethno-regions, and this development is accompanied by grave dangers. After all, ethno-regions are founded upon a shared religion, and/or a shared language, or an often supposed and alleged common collective heritage (clan, race, etc.) and all of this easily leads to atavistic forms of chauvinism, nationalism, or even racism.

In former Yugoslavia we have witnessed, and even condoned, in the past decade the murderous practice of "ethnic cleansing." In this respect, cities are a strong counteracting force. If they possess a vibrant urbanity radiating outward into the surrounding region, they exhibit a modern, flexible kind of solidarity based upon the fact that the citizens and their economic, social, and cultural organizations share material and immaterial interests. Urbanity is

founded upon shared interests, not upon shared language, religion, or (even worse) blood and soil. The closed solidarity typical of ethno-regions ("us" sharply distinguished from "them") is impossible in urban (metropolitan) regions if only because such city regions are composed of multiple cultures. While urbanites are often chauvinistic (certainly so when proud of their city) this chauvinism is tongue-in-cheek and larded with relativizing humor. When an urbanite moves to another city, he usually identifies quickly and easily with his new residential surroundings. Unlike rural identification and solidarity, urban identification is a flexible phenomenon. It is, after all, not deeply rooted in the kinds of emotions linked with language, religion, and blood relations. It is, as we saw, shared material and immaterial interests that primarily bind urbanites together. In this respect, urban (metropolitan) regions (citistates) are particularly fit to function in the next century when globalization and regionalism will further develop and reinforce one other.

Metropolitan Authorities

The question immediately arises as to whether such urban regions should not be governed by an encompassing authority that incorporates the administrative powers and competencies of the next higher layer of government, such as the county or state in America and the province in Europe. Indeed, it would seem an administrative Pavlovian reaction to search for comprehensive regional authorities endowed with the necessary powers and competencies to deal adequately with common issues and problems of the entire urban region. The most pertinent issues, of course, are the economic development of the region as a whole, housing, labor market, transportation, traffic, water-sewage provisions, environmental care, etc.

In America, two metropolitan regions are usually mentioned as examples: the twin cities of Minneapolis/St. Paul, and Portland, Oregon. In the twin cities region, the chairman and director are not elected, but nominated by the governor of Minnesota. The regional board, I was told, has muscle but no teeth. When it comes to making decisions in the

case of competitive, clashing interests, critics claim that this regional authority is almost powerless.

Portland's regional authority, on the other hand, is elected by the citizens of the region, so it need not depend on top-down delegated power. It possesses bottom-up elective authority and legitimacy. It, therefore, has muscle as well as teeth. (It reminds the Dutch, of course, of our recently proposed and rejected "urban province.") I was told that, to date, all attempts to introduce the Portland model in other urban regions of America have failed. One of the main reasons for this failure is that in America, as in the Netherlands, the simple fact remains that it is virtually impossible to break through the administrative autonomies of the local communities. Both countries have an historically-based, deeply ingrained desire for local autonomy.

Administrative structures in the United States are very complex since they are highly dismembered. The urban region of Phoenix, Arizona, for example, has less than one million inhabitants while including 138 local community boards, 21 cities, 56 school districts, and 60 special-functions districts. The three-county region surrounding Seattle has about 2.5 million inhabitants and consists of 65 cities, 48 school districts, and 213 special districts. How could such administratively-pulverized regions ever function as citistates?

The answer, of course, is that American democracy has always been a radically decentralized one, having been organized in a bottom-up fashion from the very beginning. Americans have traditionally opposed top-down authorities, since it is in the nature of such authorities to neutralize local autonomies, particularly those of the very small, and therefore vulnerable units, like towns, neighborhoods, and streets. It is these small, basic units—not the larger bodies like counties and states, let alone the federal government—that are the essence and very foundation of American democracy. In fact, before the emergence of the comprehensive (and thereby centralized) welfare state, the Netherlands, too, was a highly decentralized nation of cities, regions, and provinces—a situation that is presently undergoing restoration due to the waning of the comprehensive

welfare state and the emergence of the European Union as a Europe of regions rather than of nation-states.

In any case, although both America and the Netherlands may want to keep top-down, urban-regional authorities at bay, this does not mean that we should not try to coordinate regionally the functions shared by inner cities, suburbs, satellite cities, and maybe even edge cities. As in the corporate world strategic alliances of autonomous administrative units, rather than mergers controlled by superimposing authorities, should be the model for such efforts of regional coordination and cooperation. There is at this time no immediate need for a comprehensive urban-regional authority which governs in a top-down fashion over administratively autonomous units. As Curtis Johnson, until recently the chairman of the Metropolitan Council of Minneapolis/St. Paul, and a well-known specialist of metropolitan regionalism, said when I asked him about the criticism that his board had muscle but no teeth:

That's OK, because a regional authority like ours doesn't need power and the display of power. If it would have to compete with the multiple powers of the autonomous local bodies, it would get the worst of it anyway. A regional authority like ours should earn respect and trust by successfully coordinating and integrating the various functions shared by the whole region. For that, one indeed needs muscles, but not teeth.

If you have followed the debates about the eventually-rejected urban provinces of Rotterdam (see "Regional Cooperation in the Rotterdam, Holland Metro Area," pp. 73-78 of this issue) and Amsterdam (voted down by the citizens of these cities in two separate referenda) and if you have kept abreast with the national policies concerning the larger cities of The Netherlands, you will have noticed many similarities with what I have presented so far. As immense as the other differences between Europe and America are, the issues and problems of inner cities, suburbs, satellite cities, and metropolitan regions are surprisingly similar. It is only the American-sized edge cities that will be missing in the Netherlands. That is simply because we are a very small country and thus

haven't the space required for this kind of settlements. Neither would the existing legislation concerning land use allow this kind of development.

Nevertheless, we should realize that there are recent developments in the Netherlands which remind us of these American edge cities. If one travels by train from Amsterdam Airport to the city of Amsterdam, one sees clusters of office buildings that bear the characteristics of an edge city. Also the spread of specialized shops beyond city limits and along highways may well be the beginning of edge city developments. Recent government proposals to lift the legal restrictions of such developments for the sake of market liberalization may well open the gates for the establishment of office buildings, hotels, and maybe eventually housing as well. Elsewhere in Europe—in France, Germany and Scandinavia—edge city developments may soon emerge and change the landscapes of these countries in a manner very similar to that of America. One might very well ask, however, if these are desirable developments.

How are we dealing with urban regionalism in the Netherlands? After voters rejected creating urban provinces in the Amsterdam and Rotterdam regions, a sort of melancholic despondency seems to have come over national politicians, urban magistrates, and their supporting civil servants. At this time, no one wants to address the issue of urban-regional planning politically. This seems not only uncalled for but unwise in view of the processes of globalization and "Europeanization" (i.e., the increasing economic and political unification of Europe within the context of the European Union). In this regard, I see two points as being of great importance. First, both globalization and Europeanization are rather paradoxical processes, since they require us to think and act in ever-larger, even global relationships and networks on the one hand, while at the very same time smaller units like regions, cities, towns, down to neighborhoods and streets are seeming to gain existential relevance to citizens on the other hand. Second, I refer back to Delors' statement that we are heading for a Europe of regions rather than of nation-states—i.e., the European Union will not develop into a United

States of Europe. I then added that we should view these regions not as ethno-regions but as urban and metropolitan regions. Paraphrasing Jane Jacobs, the wealth of nations will increasingly be dependent on cities and, beyond them, on urban and metropolitan regions.

City Region Rotterdam

These two points should imbue urban administrators, civil servants, and inhabitants of urban regions with the sense of urgency that has always been the primary drive of changes and innovations. In other words, they need to realize that regional coordination and cooperation is urgently needed in view of mutual problems and promises. Rotterdam and its satellite cities, for example, cannot afford not to cooperate closely in dealing with their regional issues, such as economic development, housing, infrastructure, etc. The rejected urban province might have had teeth, but it obviously would have lacked authoritative muscle. It was massively rejected by the citizens of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. This, however, is not necessarily the end of regional coordination and cooperation. On the contrary, there are existing legal structures, such as the Common Regulation Act and the Changing Administration. These legal and institutional parameters enable urban and metropolitan regions in the Netherlands to organize their regional coordinating and cooperative efforts. They are the legal and institutional parameters for the existing Stadsregio Rotterdam ("City Region Rotterdam"), and for similar authorities elsewhere in the Netherlands as well. They should be strengthened and further elaborated in the near future. They enable us to organize regional coordination and cooperation without sacrificing local autonomies. Come to think of it, due to the short-sighted desire to set up comprehensive metropolitan authorities even at the expense of local autonomies and idiosyncracies, Dutch politicians, administrators, and civil servants have failed in the recent past to exploit the opportunities which both acts had to offer. Particularly in view of the processes of globalization and Europeanization, both acts should be reappraised and better exploited.

It was actually upon my return from the fact-finding tour through the United States that I became interested in how the existing Stadsregio Rotterdam coordinates and integrates the common, boundary-transcending interests of 18 independent communities in the fields of economic planning, labor market, land use planning, housing, transportation and traffic, environment, green-space provisions, and youth care. The councils of the 18 communities are represented in proportion to the number of inhabitants in a regional council composed of 40 members and chaired by the mayor of Rotterdam. Remarkably, this is not an authority installed by the national or provincial government in a top-down delegation of power, nor is it an elected body. It is rather a democratically-delegated, bottom-up administrative council. The members of this council elect eight persons who, together with the chairman of the council and an administratively-supporting secretary, make up the executive committee. A relatively small office (32 full-time positions) performs the necessary administrative support functions. In short, although this regional council lacks the kind of teeth the proposed but rejected urban province would have possessed, it is not completely toothless either since it has a decision-making power that has been delegated from the 18 constituent councils. Moreover, if it performs its coordinating and integrating functions satisfactorily, it will develop the muscle needed to launch Rotterdam and its surrounding satellite cities into the 21st century as an economically, socio-culturally, and politically viable urban region—a region also able to withstand the competition of comparable regions like Hamburg, Antwerp, and Le Havre. We should realize that it is not Rotterdam but the Rotterdam region that is the proud host of the largest transfer and container harbor in the world.

Incidentally, Stadsregio Rotterdam is not the only regional authority. There are other bodies covering regional functions. Examples are the one dealing with environmental issues (Dienst Centraal Milieubeheer Rijnmond), the police region, the fire department, and various offices dealing with recreation in the Rotterdam region. Stadsregio Rotterdam will no doubt be tempted to incorporate these bod-

ies and their specialized functions, but this well-known specimen of administrative centralization should be opposed, and, if need be, forcefully combated. After all, a certain degree of administrative division or even disorder can be wholesome for a country and a region. The urging of many modern politicians, administrators, and bureaucrats to reduce everything to the same denominator—to iron out all differences and contradictions—can easily kill all creativity and innovation. Obviously, administrative dismemberment has its limits. An excessively radical, insufficiently planned decentralization can cause the kind of chaos and disorder that is the perfect environment for corruption and organized crime. But within certain limits, decentralization and a degree of controlled chaos can be valuable. One of my American spokesmen expressed it nicely as follows:

Our governmental and administrative structures are decentralized to the extreme, and at times maddeningly diversified. It causes many problems but has yet one great advantage: it enables scores of experiments; something is tried here, something is set up there; things that work can become pieces of policy and planning; things that don't work, simply evaporate.

If in Europe and certainly in the Netherlands someone has a new and innovative idea, immediately a committee is set up supported by one or more bureaucrats. This committee, usually financed by the government, starts conducting meetings, produces position papers, publishes an intermediary report, conducts more meetings, and publishes its final report. Meanwhile, the new and creative idea that has been subjected to scores of amendments, rules, and procedures, runs the risk of a soft death. The final report then ends up in a drawer belonging to one or the other politician.

In my opinion, Rotterdam and its surrounding satellite cities ought to continue on the road toward a functional metropolitan region. The concept of the Stadsregio Rotterdam should be communicated better to the citizens living and working in this region. Too little effort has been put into the communication so crucial to the legitimacy of this authority. Our administrators and their civil servants have the un-

fortunate tendency to communicate primarily (and sometimes exclusively) with one other instead of with the citizens of the Rotterdam region. This, incidentally, was also one of the main reasons why the urban province plans failed so miserably. Their proponents forgot to communicate their ideas and plans to the citizens of Rotterdam and Amsterdam. It was as if one day, out of the clear blue sky, the citizens suddenly discovered that their city was going to be abolished as an autonomous body to be replaced by a rather abstract, unimaginable higher body, called an "urban province." To acquire muscle, the Stadsregio Rotterdam stands in need of legitimacy, and this legitimacy depends on the positive support of the region's citizens.

These days, cities everywhere engage in city marketing. This is understandable and reasonable because, more than ever before, cities are competing with one another globally. Rotterdam itself is too small and insignificant to set up a viable city marketing program. Instead, it should position itself internationally as a metropolitan region, the world's largest harbor. Due to the energetic and strategic policies of the former mayor, Rotterdam and its surrounding region has earned its place on the international map of cities. It occupies also an important place in the new league of cities, called the Eurocities. Rotterdam should engage in all of this in close cooperation with its surrounding 17 satellite communities, playing the role of director or conductor. In this process, the Stadsregio Rotterdam could well function as a kind of catalyst. An example of how this could work could involve the fact that Rotterdam was elected as Cultural Capital for 2001. In my view, this should be handled as a regional project. After all, culture is an outstanding example of a function that transcends urban boundaries while still needing a strong inner city which operates as the catalyst and the nursery of cultural innovation and stimulation. Moreover, the urban region houses more than one million citizens. In global terms, this would seem to be a minimal population when it comes to justifying the notion of a "capital."

In conclusion, if we continue to reinforce and slowly extend the functions of the Stadsregio

Rotterdam, we may well gradually and unintentionally realize what administrators, politicians, and civil servants had been trying to achieve in their failed attempts to set up the urban provinces of Rotterdam and Amsterdam. It may also be possible, however, that 21st century Europe will no longer need such cumbersome and inflexible institutional structures. Functional, bottom-up bodies like the Stadsregio Rotterdam may be much more adequate for satisfying the rapidly changing and therefore flexible needs of people. ■

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