Ashok Saraf
Distributed smart urbanization. New paradigm for post internet era

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New paradigm for post internet era

by Ashok Saraf

Introduction

If we see the world as populated by humanity with respect to population density and the state of urbanization we see very interesting picture. Some of the most populated countries are less urbanized compared to thinly populated countries. The state of urbanization is linked to the state of modernization and industrialization, which require a significant population migration to support economic activity and livelihoods. In the postmodern era with the advent of automation and the subsequent reduction in mass employment in industrial manufacturing activity, large population in urban centres has changed occupation to the services sector. With the advent of the internet, many services jobs became global and created another shift in aggregation pattern without population migration. With increased network availability, in post internet era the very concept of location vanishes and one can serve from anywhere, for anywhere, in many occupations besides some that require physical activity in a specific location. With the increased availability of reliable and rapid transportation of goods, even manufacturing shifted to China and there is no more real need for the migration of population to urban ghettos. These rapid changes in our own lifetime in last few decades have brought us to a point where we need to examine the very idea of Urbanization.

Figure 1. The percentage of urbanized population by country (2018 data).

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Population_density.

Figure 2. Population density (people per Km^2) by country, 2006.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urbanization_by_country.

Characteristics of urbanization

Traditionally urbanization was characterized by the distribution of various economic strata among its population, leading to political power and economic power concentrated in few families which would be mostly employers and owners of assets. For the majority of the population on one hand there was membership of large groups, giving anonymity, and on the other hand aspirations to climb the ladders of growth, to migrate within urban framework to higher levels of economic strength and/or political power.

Urbanization also created secondary and tertiary markets beyond subsistence-level activities as large economic surplus was generated. The artists and designers filled in the roles of services providers in these large urban markets. With the advent of mass media however, even these jobs became distributed and services from anywhere to anywhere with global availability, creating a situation where urban presence is not essential to play those roles.

In the post internet era it would be interesting to identify future trends which could drive the urbanization. A few of them are very clearly visible and some new trends have become prominently visible, especially those leading to wellness, thanks to Corona virus impacting all lifestyle patterns.

Characteristics of urbanization that create a personal space within the social network are now being replaced by social media-based social spaces that transcend urban physical limits. Wealth and access to goods and services, the luxuries of urban lifestyles are now available online thanks to ecommerce and one does not have to be part of the real physical market, visiting the shopping streets, anymore. Moreover, with new norms of social distancing-based restrictions, such spaces will become nonviable and close down. The same forces will eliminate the crowd aspect of city and factories or workspaces and work from home pattern could create completely new possibilities for non-commuting urban society.

With Twitter and other online media-based global opinion makers, the nature of politics also shifts from actual physical meetings to media image and direct social contact with masses via online social media has been seen lately in many large democracies.

Thus, the characteristics of typical urban living are no longer the criteria for the formation and continuation of traditional urbanization.

Emergence of the new urbanization

After experiencing the hazards of crowded populations in cities, including pollution and loss of overall wellness for most of the average population in urban areas, the world is now looking forward to more options to continue to obtain the benefits of urban living while doing away with the problems, to start new way of living. The lockdown conditions caused by the coronavirus have given us the opportunity not only to explore these options, but possibly make them essential for the survival of humanity.

This new urbanization would have the foundation of networks of data and networks of things as essential elements. Networks of data or information here mean regular internet and its new emerging forms such as blockchain and 5G and other advanced infrastructure. Network of things is the efficient open transportation system for things, to facilitate free movement of goods across the world from anywhere to anywhere. Such logistics networks would possibly merge into one global internet of logistics where all transporter would function, as the various internet services providers work with data.

New urbanization would give rise to architecture where families and small groups would live with social distancing and come together more online and be closer to nature. Thus the infatuation of humanity to relate only to their own species will be replaced by more fulfilling relationship models, via inclusive co-habitation of humans with nature. New urbanization would create these possibilities by spreading far and wide and occupying

the Earth without impacting it and taking away space from other life forms, as it did in the recent past.

This urbanization would not be possible without the tremendous progress in information and communication technologies and with soon proliferating artificial intelligence to replace the traditional roles of governments and the so-called wisdom of councils in traditional urban societies. That is why this would be DISTRIBUTED SMART URBANIZATION.

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