

MESSAGE to AESOP2012

by
David Harvey

In Response to Questions of LOC

At the occasion of his visit to METU Ankara
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First of all, I would like to congratulate the Planning Association for being 25 years old. It is still youthful enough to imagine, I think, a very significant future. But I think the future for planners is problematic but also a moment of intense opportunity.

The world is now becoming a thoroughly urbanized place. We are now, if you like, entering into a phase of what might be called the end of the game of urbanization of the planet earth, with hyper-urbanization occurring in parts of the world like China, much of the Middle East, and even now very strongly occurring in Africa.

And I think the situation now is one **by** the other of the three major problems that planners are going to have to address, and which will require radical re-thinking of how urbanization is working and what kind of cities we are going to be living in, in the future

These three problems, as I see it, are first the problem of global impoverishment, global social inequality, global marginalization, disempowerment, the lack of democratic institutions whereby most of the population can really be participants in the urbanization process. That is a general area of concern.

If we take an issue such as poverty, we have been told again and again over the last 50 years that soon there will be an end to global poverty, and the primary means by which that end will be achieved is of course through liberating capital accumulation, liberating the free market and all the rest of it, and I think what we now surely should be able to understand is that is not the path towards the elimination of global poverty.

I must go back to one of the fundamental propositions I have always drawn from Marx's Capital, which is, a free market system which is based on entrepreneurial initiative and is unregulated in anyway does not actually eliminate global poverty. What it does is to create vast disparities of income and wealth. And therefore we have to think about an alternative way of pursuing that goal of ending marginalization and global inequality, and global poverty.

A second major issue, I think, which is a very important one, is obviously the condition of the environmental degradation and environmental issues; those issues that have become far more

prominent over the last 30 or 40 years. And again it is going to involve inspired dedication to rethinking of what urbanization is about in order to actually reduce the consumption of fossil fuels, keep the land open in such a way as to maintain bio-diversity, take care of threatened habitats, and so on, and to try to come up with a way of living which is far less stressful in relationship to many environmental qualities.

So we have to take care of qualities of air, qualities of water, qualities of the land
And with urbanization sprawling as it currently is, it becomes almost impossible to do that without actually containing the urban processes in imaginative and I think environmentally fruitful and friendly ways.

The Third problem is one which is not generally discussed, but which to me is very important. Capitalism has always been about growth. The minimum adequate growth rate is generally thought to be something like 3%, but it is 3% compounding rate of growth.

And when you think of 3% compounding rate of growth over the last two past centuries, and the position it brought us right now, and then you think about 3% compounding growth over the next two or three centuries, you clearly see that something has to be done about this growth complex in which we live in a capitalist society.

So is there a way in fact then to pursue? A zero growth economy, which is socially just and environmentally beneficial, and that should in fact be the long-term aim, and again there is no way we can approach that without inspired ideas about new ways of urban living, and new ways of coordinating both production and consumption in metropolitan areas, new ways of living without again putting stress on resources and the like.

So those are the three areas that seem to me: social inequality, impoverishment area, environmental area and then the question of what we are going to do as growth prospects actually run out on planet earth, how we are going to accommodate. And in all these areas people who are working on what cities are about, and how cities are going to be designed are going to play, seems to me, a crucial role provided that we can raise our heads above the daily grind of trying to find a place to put this facility in the city, or do this with traffic there, raise our head above all that and ask macro-questions and see if we can set up instead a planning institution that can re-plan the urbanization of the planet earth in a rational, zero-growth mode.

I wish you well in the Conference.

I think you will have very fruitful discussion.

My hope is that some of the discussion will proceed on these issues

Thank you and good luck.