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The Town of the European Republic

Dear Rector of Lüneburg University, Dear Major of the Town of Lüneburg, Dear Richard David Precht as the Spin-doctor of this Utopia conference, Dear distinguished faculty & Guests,

It is my utmost pleasure to open the Future Festival of University Lüneburg 2021. I am very thankful that the University of Lüneburg has framed the title of this Keynote: "*The Town of the European Republic".* This is fantastic as it alludes to my own utopian design for Europe. It provides me with the opportunity to describe how I see the upcoming relationship between Europe and its towns in 2049, which is the year, which I set as starting year of the European Republic.

To stimulate you visually, you will be seeing during my presentation – in the background - the poster of an initiative of twenty Italian majors, who decided to entitle – in the *real* (!) world - their cities *"Città della Repubblica d'Europa".*[i] They have added "Città della Repubblica d'Europa" on their "Ortseingangsschilder". Yet, perhaps it is a European problem that the online translation service Leo does not know a translation for "Ortseingangschilder". ☺

Yet, here we are: in some parts of Italy, the Town of the European Republic is not in the future, it is reality. I would love to see the town of Lüneburg reaching out to these Italian majors and becoming the first German Città della Repubblica d'Europa…

In this short keynote – I was asked to talk for some 15 minutes in English and without PowerPoint – I will develop four aspects of the future **Town of the European Republic**:

1.) Firstly, I will go back to what were the role of the towns in the Middle ages.
2.) Secondly, I will briefly talk about the research of namely Saskia Sassen from Columbia University and talk about the networks of modern towns.
3.) Thirdly, I will touch upon some architectural features of these towns.
4.) Fourthly, I will focus on the political economy of rural/ urban divisions and I will sketch out some questions with respect to their governance.

As this key note will be uploaded as PDF with some literature, references and charts, you can lean back and listen, and read or print it later again.

1. Let's start with some spotlights on the historical role of towns.

Towns are, were water is: rivers, lakes or Oceans. Paris or Vienna, Lyon or Prague, Marseille, Cologne or Hamburg are water towns. The social strata of a town follows the wind, which goes East in Europe. This is why the Bourgeoisie always lives West, whereas the dirty production areas are East.

Towns were the first embodiments of democracy, meaning public action in the Aristotelian sense: the Ancient Agora in the Greek world were market places; the Republic of Venice or the Republic of Genua

were independent town governments. The "Freie Reichsstädte" in Germany or the Hansestädte were actually not keen to integrate the Deutsches Reich of Bismarck. Until today, the official name of Hamburg is "Freie Hansestadt Hamburg". Long before the invention of Nation-States (or "Flächenstaaten"), towns had emblems and forged the core identity of their citizens. Towns were the entities in which the public sphere was developed: The Kings and Kurfürsten had their residencies in town, whereas the Churches often owned the countryside and the lands. Towns were also the place, where civilization developed, as Norbert Elias describes: The Arts and the banking system, public bathes or parks, theatre or concert halls: all are product of urban living culture.[ii]

Each Town had their Noblesse: the Fugger of Augsburg, the Medici's of Milano. This accounts also for those towns called today *secondary* or *tertiary* towns such as Brünn or Antwerpen, Würzburg or Bourdeaux, Edinburgh or Gdansk. All have a feudal past, which makes their architectural beauty of today. Medieval ballot systems, town councils or "Schöffengerichte" were para-democratic or republican governance systems of the town Bourgeoisie. Until today, *Freie Wählergemeinschaften,* mostly liberal, are key to manage towns: Stralsund for instance has some 40% share of "Freie Wählergemeinschaften" in local elections: Citizens care for their towns, beyond and independently from parties.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, towns were closed. There citizens, who had town rights – and those excluded from the towns: the *Gesindel*, ragtag, peasants, the mob or outlawed. Towns had town walls and water bridges, to keep them all away. Merchants needed town passes to sneak through the city gate. Please, remind the latter for the following.

2. **Networks of towns are nothing new.**

The Hanse is probably one of the most excitant historical town cooperation along the Baltics Sea. Yet, towns longing historical trade roads are equally important, for instance the towns along the French route for Commerce of the Champagne*,* or the towns along the Silk Road from Beijing to Belgrade. A line of towns forms what is called in Europe the "Blue Banana", stretching from Amsterdam to Vienna, Triest and Bucharest.

Columbia Professor Saskia Sassen has shown in her research[iii] that modern towns have more in common than towns with their own "Hinterland". For instance, Saô Paolo, New York and Amsterdam are tight together through coffee beans, which are collected around Saô Paolo, rated at Stock Markets in New York and shipped to Europa via Amsterdam Harbor. The economic basis of these three giant towns is coffee. Amsterdam, in economic strata, has more in common with New York than perhaps with Leiden. Glass Fiber or broadband connections under the earth of the Oceans link New York to London or Frankfurt, but not necessarily New York to Salt Lake City. Town networks follow commerce routs and not country borders. Regional capitals like Munich, Dallas or Barcelona have international relation departments and something like a "foreign policy" aside from their reciprocal state departments. Towns actually shape policies. It was quite a moment, when some American Towns like Detroit or Philadelphia announced to stick the global climate goals of the Paris agreement, whereas the Trump Administration had withdrawn from it. Anne Hidalgo, the Major of Paris, deciding on "Green Paris", building vélo-streets and banning cars may do more for Frances' environmental policy than the French Minister for the environment may. If you buy an electrical vélo in Paris, you get some 400,- Euro cash from the town administration. Towns will drive the transformation to a climate neutral, digital and sustainable future – if we agree on the fact, that "sustainability" is not a lure for ongoing consumption under different

technological modalities and surfaces.[iv] Unfortunately, 15 minutes are not enough to discuss in detail, whether "smart" is the new code for the infantilisation of humankind. That is what stunning Catalan Philosopher Marina Garcès from University Saragossa writes in her book: "*For a new, radical enlightment*".[v] It seems as if the world has decided that a digitalized world is a better, because smarter world. For the remaining 8 minutes of my keynote, I will stick to this assumption. Although I actually believe that digitalization and Artificial Intelligence is a technic to reinstitute patriarchate – control over women – in times where women claim too much power.

3. **Leaving the infantilisation question aside, the Town of the European Republic will be smart & digital.**

The Town of the European Republic will have, as main architectural feature, a huge train station in its core. Railway stations will be the new airports in 2049, one year before Europe attains climate neutrality in 2050. The current pandemic triggered, as one of its consequences, the European Rescue Package from July 2020, worth 750 Billion Euro. Among other things, the money is spend to build a high-speed train net in Europe, from Copenhagen to Budapest and from Hamburg to Barcelona. The European high-speed train need is the new European Subway, named METROPA: you take for instance the Metropa-line 6 and you go straight from Hamburg to Barcelona in 6 stations only.[vi] It is a pity that the European Commission could not bring together the consortium between Siemens and Alstom in 2019, building a European high-speed train, but perhaps things will still change. Flying taxis using solar energy will pick you in 2049 from the railway station and bring you to hotel, or a conducter-less tram, like in Zurich. At the hotel, an Android will wait for you at the reception and lead you to the air-conditioned room, which you pay with the new crypto currency the ECB has been issuing in the years after the pandemic. Friedrich von Borries has designed, in a way, the future town of the European Republic in his book "*Weltentwerfen*".[vii] If you want to get a first impression of this future town of the European Republic, I recommend a trip to the 17th Arrondissement of Paris, a former *Banlieu* for workers, closed to the Boulevard Clichy and very dirty. Emmanuel Macron has decided to move the offices of Palais de Justiceto this shabby place and build an autonomous underground train to the 17th Arrondissement. In addition, a completely new arrangement of housing blocks was built for the civil servants working at Palais de Justice, with new, energy neutral construction material, mainly wood and glass, surrounded by green plants. None of these housing blocks looks similar; they are all of different style, color and material. The housing blocks got their supermarket and their park: a Japanese-style Refugio with places for sports and for kids and some fountains, because the architectures anticipated earth warming. Some of the housing blocks have landing places for drones every 10th floor or so. This futuristic 17th Arrondissement is an example of what Anne Hidalgo calls the "15 minutes town": everything you need is available within 15 minutes, be that a bakery or a doctor. In some way, living in Paris (or Barcelona or Berlin) will be somehow meaningless in 2049: you never leave your *Kiez.* The "15 minutes town" will be a horizontal network of "Kiezes" or Arrondissments, in which the old town Paris *intra muros* is no longer the center. Metropolitan areas or agglomerations will no longer function around market places, churches or historical old towns, featuring a Castle or a prominent museum (like the Uffizi, the Prado or the Louvre). This will change the social strata: the new 17th Arrondissement in Paris is "Posh", and no longer a workers space like the old 17th Arrondissement.

4. Who will be in?

The real question, similar to the middle ages, will be, who is **in** the" 15 minutes town" – and who not? Modern gentrification processes are pushing the working class people, migrants and underdogs – which some already call the new feudal slavery class[viii] – ever more outside of the towns. The new political question thus might be: who has citizens' rights and who not? The question of the political linkage between the future towns of the European Republic and their surroundings might become the most important thing to look at in political science: who cares for the countryside? Some sciences fiction novels push the segregation up to the fact that towns, in the near future, will become the only places with decent living conditions - for instance filtered air and consumable water, let alone mobility or cultural infrastructure - whereas the countryside will increasingly deter due to numerous environmental disaster. Rural areas will become the garbage deposit of the metropolitan areas, whereas vegetable and greens will be cultivated in infrared greenhouses within the towns and meat will be produced in vitro. Living in towns will become a feudal privilege for the few in the middle of devastated landscapes for the many.

Let's assume here that the counter-narrative, the often described "Landflucht"-trend, including slow-food agriculture will not materialize. In this case, the emergence of towns as dominant political actors, but closed entities, with each having a slum for the *Gesindel in* their surroundings, will probably be decisive for shifts in the parliamentary and representative systems of todays "Flächenstaaten", which all suffer from a substantial rural/ urban voter divide. Current election data in Europe point to enormous cleavages between structurally weak and depopulated rural areas in which it is hard to keep any infrastructure alive; and the Metropolitan areas or "Hipster" towns dragging the brains, wealth and culture. The red and cosmopolitan Vienna surrounded by turquoise, rural Austria, or the Eastern parts of Poland in difference to the sparkling towns of Warsaw, Wroclaw, or Gdansk are examples for this. Studying the political connection between the Regions and Europe is the core idea of our research project REGIOPARL, which you can visit in the internet.[ix]

Within the REGIOPARL project we have collected regional politicians worries about those developments, demonstrating their huge awareness of phenomena like "brain drain", emigration of regional inhabitants to cities and regions falling behind their dominant metropolises. Hence, it will be decisive whether regions are able and willing to shape their future proactively. Our fieldwork in the German-speaking community in East Belgium can be described as good practice, even more as some kind of laboratory how this could work: Future regions have to become cross-border regions for sure, using multilingualism and administrative and cultural synergies with their neighboring regions in an intelligent and meaningful manner. Concerning their relationship with their metropolises, regional politicians in East Belgium discussed this as an advantage since younger people have the chance to study in the major cities of the triangle Belgium, France and Germany and hence tend to stay in the regional area.

The *Gilet Jaunes* in France are precursors for land upraise against the cosmopolitan citizens in the towns, and in this, they resemble to *La Vendée*: the peasants upraise of 1793 to 1796 against the troupes of the first French Republic, causing some 30.000 death. The both deindustrialized and depopulated areas of the UK, the US, Poland or France and elsewhere are the fertile sole for national and populist forces. The political question is thus obvious: might we see a process in which the towns segregate from the rural areas? May we experience the end of the "Flächenstaat"?[x] May we see a development in which the citizens of the towns and those of the regions don't vote *together* any longer, as the cleavages between

them cannot be bridged any longer? Or worth, in which the rural people are outlawed and don't vote at all? A state in which citizen rights are only for those living in towns?

This may sound both horrible, dystopian, and not possible at all to you. Yet, the task of a keynote is to provoke. Therefore, I would like to touch upon Giorgio Agamben's "Homo Sacer"[xi] theory of sovereignty, in which he is peeling out sovereignty of the state context, and reframing it as "right to ban". Those are sovereign who have the right to ban others. With – as forecasts predict[xii] – some 70% of people that will be falling out of the classical production process due to the algorithm society, the question is whether these people will also fall out of the political deliberation process – a way for the meritocratic elites in the towns to secure their own metropolitan well-being. Concepts such as Unconditional Basic Income, which is already is a huge movement in Europe,[xiii] step in here. Yet, feeding economically "superfluous people" does not mean to grant them political rights. Agamben's Homo Sacer is the men who is worthless, but cannot be killed. He is simply banned, meaning kicked of the political process, which, in digitalized times, is even easier to do. Banning people online is very cheap in the "smart" world: who is not on the platforms of the towns - say: who is excluded from Clubhouse - is somehow non-existent in political terms. As the post-pandemic world has moved into a two-dimensional sphere anyway, it is very easy NOT to see all the analogue left-behinda, all these postmodern Homo Sacers, living – or starving – outside of the towns and their fancy home office or home schooling screens.

In conclusion:

Before I leaf the floor: This is obviously not the town of the European Republic I wish to see! But we probably have a lot work to do in order to fix - in a creative way - the urban/ rural relationship before it turns politically nasty in Europe. In our research project at Danube University, we developed a map in which we placed the 52 economically most important towns of Europe, all integrated directly into the global value chain. With an algorithm, we arranged that they all get – in numbers - the same amount of population surrounding the town. Some towns, who are lighthouses in the depopulated areas, have a lot of surrounding space; some other are small territories because of the density of population. What you see is a map of Europe with 52 areas, who cover more or less evenly the European territory. The idea is that each town of the European Republic gets entirely responsible – politically and economically - for its surroundings and the people living there, making sure that each town in Europe has the political burden for the same amount of countryside people. The towns, in a way, become the new state entity - as it was in the middle ages.[xiv] These 52 areas could become the pillars of a very different political representation system in Europe, featuring a horizontal network of regions, encompassing nation state borders, with each of them having an important town as their centerpiece. These towns could deploy modern technics of citizen participation, digital agoras or citizen's assemblies,[xv] which anyway cannot properly function in "Flächenstaaten".

This is just one fancy idea. Many other solutions are possible to keep democracy and rights for all citizens alive in the European Republic, without bans and outlawed. If I made you curious, come and visit our website….

Thank you very much for your attention!

Images
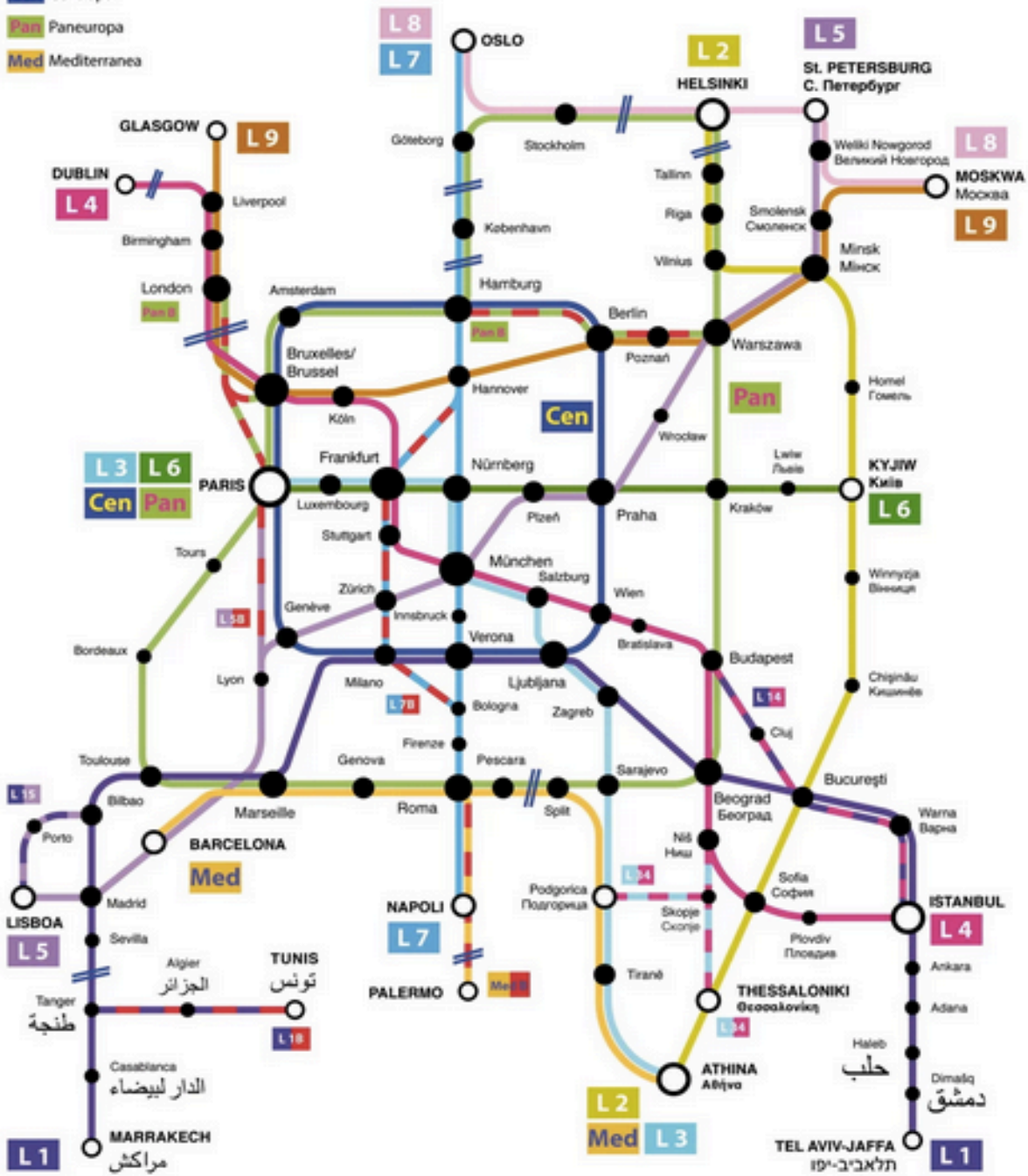
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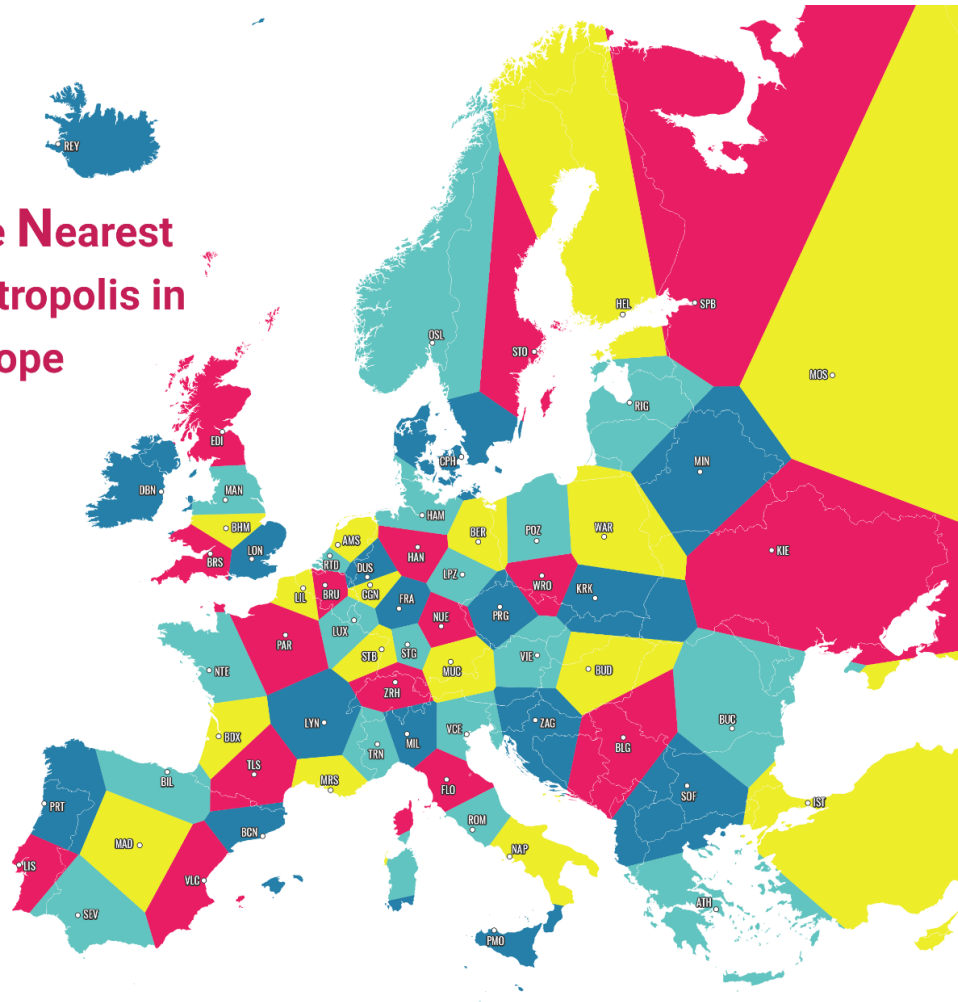

Clichy-Batignolles Martin Luther King in Paris

metropa

the european supermetro network
le réseau européen supermétro
das europäische superschnellbahnnetz

The Nearest Metropolis in Europe

[i] See website Città della Repubblica d'Europa, http://onedemos.eu/

[ii] For a brief history of towns see "The Square and the Tower: Networks, Hierarchies and the Struggle for Global Power" by Niall Ferguson (2018)

[iii] See „The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo" by Saskia Sassen (2001)

[iv] For this thesis see „Digitale Nicht-Nachhaltigkeit" by Ingolfur Blühdorn (2020)

[v] „Für eine neue radikale Aufklärung" by Marina Garcès (2017)

[vi] See www.METROPA.eu

[vii] „Weltentwerfen" by Friedrich von Borries (2016)

[viii] „Die Rückkehr der Diener: Das neue Bürgertum und sein Personal" by Christoph Bartmann (2016)

[ix] www.REGIOPARL.eu

[x] „Die Größe der Demokratie: Über die räumliche Dimension von Herrschaft und Partizipation" by Dirk Jörke (2019)

[xi] „Homo sacer: Die souveräne Macht und das nackte Leben" by Giogio Agamben (2016)

[xii] Studie des Europäischen Parlaments zur Situation der Arbeit 2040

[xiii] See the initiative www.UBIE.eu

[xiv] This correlates with new trends in the US, where, like in Arizona, which passed legislation allowing companies the right to create towns with full town-rights. The employees become "citizens" based on stocks and shares of the company they need to buy.

[xv] See the vast contemporary literature on Bürgerversammlungen (David von Reybrouck, Gegen Wahlen), www.buergerversammlung.de , Donnatella della Porta etc.