

Hope on the Horizon? Global Urbanization, MegaCities, and Religious Education

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Responding to Urban Social, Economic, and Cultural Transformations

The industrial revolution sparked the rise and ultimately the dominance of urbanization in the United States and Europe where two thirds to three quarters or more of the population live in urban areas. Post-industrial cities lost their manufacturing bases because the corporate economies favored overseas labor markets. These cities have gone through economic, identity, and faith crises as they have transitioned to their post-industrial complex selves. Religious educators are still sorting out how best to transmit the DNA of a faith tradition from one generation to the next in the midst of such complex social/cultural transformation.

The world's population is rising rapidly and the most dramatic rise will be in urban areas. A megacity is currently defined as a metropolitan area with more than 10 million inhabitants. Globally there were three such cities in 1975, and at least thirty-five in 2015 (estimates vary), three of which have populations above 30 million. And these trends are expected to continue. How will this urban growth influence and be influenced by economic changes? Will the consumerism and materialism that often accompany urban economic growth influence the faith commitments of the residents of the new mega-cities? What kinds of changes can faith communities expect as the populations of cities expands?

José Lobo, Luís M. A. Bettencourt, and their colleagues have been looking at what happens to various sectors as the population of cities changes. If the population doubles, what happens to infrastructure, creativity, innovation, crime, health, education, etc.? Do they also double or are there economies of scale? Or do any of these elements more than double?

Audience

The primary audience is two-fold: those who have been practicing/teaching/inquiring in cities and those who are interested in how religious education is going to address the new, global urbanization.

The idea of the workshop is to surface tried and tested responses to the various aspects of urbanization and economic change in urban environments and explore whether or how they might be applied locally and globally in the over the next 14-84 years. So ideally the audience will consist of practitioners and teachers who have been working in cities, especially megacities and the post-industrial cities that are experiencing rebirth after crisis (e.g., Pittsburgh and Dortmund); the scholars who have considered what urban sprawl has done to the continuity of religious communities and the challenge of educating in faith; and any practitioners and academics who are interested in a proactive stance toward the radical changes on the horizon.

Workshop Flow

- History of urbanization from 1850-present (5 minutes)

- Introduction to the Conversation Scaffolding Tool (2 minutes)
 - Break into interest groups around the topics highlighted in Quito
 - Articulate what has worked in the past in participants' cities on the topic in question (10 minutes)
 - Report back to the large group (15 minutes)
 - Identify threads, integrations, synergies, authors, etc. (5 minutes)
- Projections regarding urbanization, scaling in cities, and slum growth over the next 14-84 years (7 minutes)
- Pushing the Conversation Scaffolding Tool a bit deeper (2 minutes)
 - Break back into interest groups
 - Explore how the lessons of the past might support, interfere with, oppose, be a beacon, or otherwise be in dialogue with the projections about the future – locally and globally (10 minutes)
 - Report back to the large group (15 minutes)
 - Identify hopes, and places where hope is needed (5 minutes)
- Open the floor to a discussion about the responsibilities the field of RE has to the larger global conversation about urbanization in the coming years, the opportunities it has to contribute (hope) to that conversation, and the threats to RE from these social trends (14 minutes)

Theories Informing the Workshop

The overarching learning theory undergirding the workshop is found in Jack Mezirow's work, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* and its progeny. The idea is that participants have observed on a local scale the kinds of faith transformations that have (or have not) accompanied the social, cultural, and economic transformations that cities have experienced in recent years. Further, it is assumed that participants will be tasked with helping the faithful deal with disorienting dilemmas as the next several decades unfold and help them transform new understandings of the world. The goal is to begin to identify the kinds of transformational tools that religious educators will need over the course of the next 14 years and beyond.

The theoretical framework behind the presentation on what to expect in city growth over the next 14-84 years is from the scaling in cities work of Geoffrey West, Luís M. A. Bettencourt, and José Lobo and their colleagues at the Santa Fe Institute.

Resources to Be Used in the Workshop

The Conversation Scaffolding Tool will be a two dimensional intersection of a document that is to be produced in Quito in October, 2016 (a telescope of sorts) and Bert Roebben's (2013) *Seeking Sense in the City* (a microscope of sorts).

The United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) is scheduled to take place from 17-20 October 2016. The previous two conferences were in 1976 and 1996. The goal of Habitat III is to articulate a New Urban Agenda. This New Urban Agenda will be used to identify areas of concern.

Roebben presents a hopeful view of what can happen in the postmodern urban context of religious education. This will be overlaid with the New Urban Agenda that will emerge from

Quito. The Roebben material will create an opportunity for participants to grasp their close-up or localized views of the Habitat III big issues.