

INTRODUCTION

The annual Megacities lectures look at the development of the world's large cities. The focus is sometimes on themes relating to design and planning, and sometimes on themes more in the area of the city economy, social relationships, city culture, and so on. In the past, Peter Hall, Richard Rogers and the Singaporean planner Liu Thai-Ker have looked at planning and design, while Saskia Sassen, Deyan Sudjic and David Harvey have opted for the other approach, the approach which, with Richard Sennett, returns to the agenda in the 2003 lecture.

In the Netherlands, there is an increasingly heated discussion about the question of how to deal with people who have not 'integrated'. The discussion focuses most on ethnic groups who do not speak the language and who do not behave in accordance with Dutch values and standards, but other groups such as the unemployed and those receiving disability pensions are being singled out more and more for criticism. In general, people are expected to be independent, to assume responsibility, to look after themselves. To exploit the opportunities afforded by globalisation. If they do not, the initial reaction is less and less to think that they should receive assistance, and more and more to accuse them of failing to assume responsibility for their own lives and of being parasites.

The discussion was repressed for a long time as being 'politically incorrect'. Those who fell behind were not themselves to blame: society had placed them in that position, so society had the duty to do something about it in the form of state intervention. The state was fully confident that it could do this. The taboo on the discussion has now been lifted and the political parties are scrambling over each other in their haste to demand active integration from those involved. We hear little about the role played by the native society itself, both in the past and in the present, in 'the failure of integration'. Nor is there any great need felt to temper the prevailing idea that integration has been unsuccessful, for example by quoting instances of the opposite.

The first idea that emerges in this discussion is that the welfare state, as the pre-eminent characteristic of a civilised society, is starting to collapse. By contrast, a

more positive reaction is also possible. The old system does provide material support, but does not grant people enough dignity. In fact, there is no confidence that people can regain their autonomy, and there is not really a lot of interest either. A rich society can sustain a considerable number of inactive members, and in those circumstances it is much easier to 'buy off' those involved than to follow the difficult road of reactivation and regained self-confidence. In this way, tolerance and care can conceal indifference and derision. In this perspective, it is a good thing for this system to be abandoned and replaced by a new one that, at first sight, seems hard but ultimately grants people more dignity.

This type of observation has led the board of the Megacities Association to invite Richard Sennett for this year's lecture. Sennett's concern with this issue is a particularly impressive, with 'respect' being the central theme of his latest book. Respect is easy between peers, but it is exceptionally difficult in a world where inequality is an ineluctable fact of life. Not only difficult in terms of the way in which the successful egoist prefers to shake off a 'loser'. But also difficult for the sincere social worker who does not wish to lapse into paternalism that is in fact equally lacking in respect.

The board has asked Sennett to indicate in his lecture how – even if he believes inequality is inevitable – the division can be broken down between those who benefit from market forces and globalisation and those who are left behind by these developments. How can the number of people who miss the boat be kept as low as possible? And if there are still people who need support, is it possible to provide it in a way that is not paternalistic and patronising?

8 With the first question – reducing the size of the group who miss the boat of modern society and its demands – it should be pointed out that what matters is not only the effect on those directly involved. More and more, the question is of whether society can allow itself the luxury of so many people not contributing, or not contributing optimally, to social and economic development. Percentages of school-leavers without any basic qualification for the labour market are alarmingly high in the large cities, and they are still on the increase. A failure to intervene puts the future of the large cities on the line. An associated question relates to the extreme bias towards services in the Dutch economy. Can there be an economy in which – in the most extreme version of this trend – production industry is completely absent? And if it is possible, what are the implications for the opportunities of people who would be good workers in industry or crafts but who in a service economy are condemned to do low-status, irregular and uncertain 'character-eroding' work? Is resignation the only appropriate response here or is there hope in the new concept of the 'creative city'?

This publication is designed differently from its predecessors. Richard Sennett has indicated that he does not wish to write out a paper that would then be read as a lecture. He prefers a freer form. This means that his lecture is not printed here. Instead, there are crucial chapters from three recent books: 'Flesh and Stone', 'The Corrosion of Character' and 'Respect'. They provide a good picture of how his thinking about the theme of the lecture has developed.

Otherwise, the book follows the usual pattern: the accompanying paper from Arnold Reijndorp, and also a number of short discussions about respect and social sustainability from authors working in various sections of the social field.