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World Cities of the Future

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Three of the greatest challenges in the world today are (i) extended urbanism, the rapid growth of urban areas and the complex social, political, economic, technological, and ecological problems associated with concentrated urban life; (ii) internationalism, the growth of more intensive communication and interdependence among the peoples of a politically divided world; and (iii) futurism, the broadening effort to anticipate future developments and imagine, or invent, new alternatives as a background for rational choice.

These three problems are brought together by the present trends toward huge urban regions (often called "megapolises") that often transcend national boundaries. Within these megapolitan areas the world's richest resources of science, education, culture, finance and managerial, and political guidance systems are increasingly concentrated. Communication and transportation among these areas are growing so rapidly that many commentators are already pointing to the coming of the "Nation City" and the Global Village, and Global City or Ecumenopolis.

These various threads will be brought together in the interdisciplinary symposium, "World Cities of the Future" (26–30 December 1970), under the auspices of the Society for General Systems Research at the AAAS Meeting in Chicago. The focus will be upon the worldwide problems of "galloping urbanism" not only in the immediate future but during the next three decades up to the year 2000. These are problems of concern not only to natural and social scientists but also to

professionals in medicine, engineering, education, and law, and to mathematicians, philosophers, historians, and humanists. They are of still greater concern to such new transdisciplinary breeds as ecologists, urbanologists, and systems analysts.

The unifying element in the symposium will be the effort to formulate hypotheses and guide research in a way that recognizes the similarities between and interconnections among different kinds of systems. This is the essence of general systems thinking, as distinguished from many other systems approaches. The Society for General Systems Research brings together men and women from almost every discipline in the development of research and theory relating to the common properties of a broad variety of systems, human and nonhuman, concrete and analytical. The use of general systems approaches, of course, extends far beyond the membership of the society.

The symposium will center around three sets of questions:

1) What are the probable developments in major urban areas in the world?

This question will be dealt with in the first panel on "Major Cities: Today and the Year 2000," under the chairmanship of John Dyckmann (Chairman of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of California, Berkeley).

2) What is needed to develop more effective use of science and technology in dealing with such major urban problems as environmental quality, shelter, health, and education?

These four problem areas will be considered at the following panels: "Systems Planning for Environmental Quality," under the chairmanship of Alfred Jones (Chairman, Department of Industrial Engineering and Operations Research, Wayne State University); "Shelter Systems for the Future," under the chairmanship of Milton Rubin (Raytheon Corporation); and "Urban Health: Systems Planning for the Future," under the chairmanship of Alan Sheldon (Harvard Medical School); "Urban Education: Systems Planning for the Future," under the chairmanship of Jere Clarke (Southern Connecticut State College).

3) What are the major elements in effective systems guidance for the world's urban areas of the future?

This subject will be handled in two panels: "Systems Models for Urban Planning," under the chairmanship of Britton Harris (School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania); and "Systems Management for the Urban Regions of the Future," under the chairmanship of Donald Duncan (General Motors Institute).

These panels will be placed in the broader perspective of a review of recent thought concerning the dynamics of current and emerging social system change in America and the world. This review—together with a prognosis—will be presented in the Society's presidential address under the title "The Coming Era of Systematic Societal Change."

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