

# Cities' Identity through Architecture and Arts

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*Editors*

Anna Catalani

*College of Arts, University of Lincoln, Lincoln, UK*

Zeinab Nour

*Associate Professor in Painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Helwan University, Egypt*

Antonella Versaci

*Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, University "Kore" of Enna, Italy*

Dean Hawkes

*Architect and Award-Winning Academic, Cambridge, UK*

Hocine Bougdah

*Professor of Architectural Technology, Canterbury School of Architecture, University for the Creative Arts, UK*

Professor Adolf Sotoca

*Chair Professor in Architecture at Luleå University of Technology, Sweden*

Professor Mahmoud Ghoneem

*Associate Professor in Architecture Department, Faculty of Fine Arts, Helwan University, Egypt*

Professor Ferdinando Trapani

*Professor of Urban Planning, Architecture, Palermo University, Italy*



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## Preface

Intended to be a guide for academics, scholars, and interested leaders, this book was designed to critically assess issues related to architectural identity, the city as a scene, the city as an organism, the city as a subject, and the planning or rather approaching of one.

A pressing issue for many researchers in the field, the book discusses the negative repercussions resulting from globalization. Studies have indicated that globalization, despite all the positive effects, has resulted in a loss of identity within a city. As a city develops over time, its identity is evolving as well and may even be lost due to rapid and constant changes it is subjected to. Discussed as well are examples and tendencies in dealing with urban identities as well as the transformation of cities and urban cultures mentioned in terms of form, identity, and art.

This book is a combination of innovative research submitted to a conference on Cities' Identity Through Architecture and Arts (CITAA) whereas scholars from all over the world gather in one venue to discuss cultural, historical, and economic issues of the city. Thus, the book offers a collective and global solution that is applicable on a universal level.

The research presented in this book was conducted by authors, or rather participants of the conference from, three different continents of the world and organized by IEREK. It was a distinct opportunity for them to share their thoughts with leading scholars and professionals in the field of Architecture, Arts, and Planning.

The research and materials in this book are directed at those who are actively engaged in the decision-making processes and to a heterogeneous audience who has an interest to critically examine all the new literature available in the field.

A special word of thanks should be made to the editors of this book and to all the authors and co-authors of the chapters who collectively provided the academic community with unique and increasingly valuable literature.



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## The nature of cities

Domenico Chizzoniti

*Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering Department, Politecnico di Milano, Italy*

**ABSTRACT:** As we already know, urban conditions are moving towards an “urban age”, where urbanity in its varied forms is going to characterize the human habitat and become our dominant social condition in the “recent future”. Despite their differences, many cities around the world face some common challenges as they rapidly urbanize. Social, economic and increasingly spatial inequality is a repeated theme, with cities such as Karachi, Mumbai, Lagos, Jakarta Johannesburg or Mexico City, seriously struggling to find common ground for rich and poor. In both these cities, as in many others worldwide, slums and informal settlements continue to sprawl between gated and secured luxury suburbs. A city may have redeveloped its system, outgrown its capacity or lost it altogether. A growing reliance on shrinking natural resources is one of the most alarming challenges to be faced worldwide.

*Keywords:* urban age; spatial inequality; slums; secured luxury suburbs

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 *Nature and cities*

What do we mean, today, by the words nature and cities? Are they now empty and crystalized notions or, on the contrary, do they still have a way to search, meet and explain? In which measure can a person, as historical being, understand and test the nature as a pre-condition for his/her existence? How can the relationship between nature and cities, nature and technology, nature and art be read? We try to answer these questions through different approaches and styles, starting from the condition of the new city and considering its reason and its artificial structure.

Although the theoretical context has always been improved by several contributions, a number of essential issues should be further highlighted. The first concerns the need for a unitary and simultaneously plural conception of the city as a physical and natural fact. This implies the attempt at rethinking of the impossibility of considering their relationship in dualistic terms. The recognition of the naturalness of the human settlement as the original dimension of the human beings, both as a biological and bodily organism, goes hand in hand with the discovery of their ability to transcend nature, and after all it can be said that the creator of the city, i.e. the human being, is not a nature but has a nature (Schindler 2015).

In the same way, in which neither a pure ego nor a consciousness external to the world and unrelated to nature exists, there is for us no pure nature, conceivable outside the historical condition underlying our understanding of it.

In other words, the schizophrenia characterizing the contemporary works of visual art, that convey the paradoxical conception of a nature as an available and changeable mass and, simultaneously, as a lost origin, primitive and idyllic dimension nostalgically recalled: at urban level, for example, this “pre-technical reactionary longing” (Duque 2007) appears in the creation of spaces delimited inside the city, the new enclaves of postmodernism such as gardens and parks, and even the snow-capped mountains of Dubai, the so-called new Disneyland of emirs, which artificially reproduce an uncontaminated nature.

## 1.2 *Culture and nature*

The general idea is that we are no longer able to understand the essence of the semantic structure of nature without considering the technical, urban or architectural intervention. Nature and artifice are arranged on two different levels in our artistic or technical work, therefore nature is always the “exiled” and sublimated element, which is transcended into and from our work. This also means that the natural link with the land is demonstrated within the historical time and the multiple forms of culture: paradoxically, the creative transformation of nature is not possible without prior understanding of the natural data in a horizon of meaning, thus in a historical and cultural horizon (Schindler 2015).

Spaemann states that the concept of nature is essentially dialectical, not only because it usually implies and contains an against-concept (technique, culture, rule, reason, grace etc.), but also because it represents a home and at the same time an obstacle for the human being: hence, the *conditio humana* is characterized by the tension between the inclination to the supremacy (whose instrument is science as a mere knowledge of the functional links, without interest in the origin and in the *télos*) and that to the understanding and to the relationship (typical, on the contrary, of philosophy).

Although human beings are linked to their terrestrial origin (the word *homo* comes from *humus*), nature always indicates an extraneous dimension from which we are already separated *ab initio* as reasoning beings. But the word “culture” comes from the Latin *colere*, i.e. to cultivate the land, to be meant as humanizing and not deleting nature—Heidegger will say that living means building, “a building nursing and nurturing the things that grow”.

Through (technical) action and thought, human beings overstep their natural and physical link to earth, creating a meaning horizon that allows to meet the entity: as a matter of fact, beyond any demonization, the technique is the way in which human beings interact with the natural order and, starting from this, build the human order (Duque 2007).

## 1.3 *Nature and artifice*

The construction as a form of living and the creation of a social context of people are the link between natural and artificial; the risk in this construction of human ensembles, however, is that human beings turn the movable boundary interposed between themselves and nature into a “supremacy frame”: this is what happens today in the shift from technique to technology, which is self-oriented and self-directing. It is a conception of science and technology in which they are conceived as equal or even substitutes to nature: a form of techno-nature, i.e. a phase in which the technique plays the same strangeness of nature, its inhuman and artificial character (Duque 2007).

The loss of the sense of *télos* in the conception both of nature and of life implies the transformation of science and technology from products or ways of being human into ultimate horizons of meaning, within which human beings are reduced to an ephemeral presence.

# 2 THE STATUTE OF THE CITY AND THAT OF NATURE

## 2.1 *Embellissement vs chaos*

We have a choice in front of us. Either we continue demonizing the cities or we accept that cities and nature should be harmonized for a sustainable urbanization. A “sustainable” city: a far too much widespread slogan. The idea of a contemporary globalized city aims to express a tension involving social, economic and territorial policies, but it sometimes lacks an integrated vision, i.e. its urban structure that is its essence.

The world-scale imbalances result from reckless support to global unsustainability, generated by discontinuous visions and actions of single independent additions. After all, the individual fragmentary actions are always at risk: Edward Lorenz proved it with the ‘chaos theory’ according to which the beat of a butterfly’s wing in Brazil can cause a tornado in Texas.

In the twenty-first century, the urban growth will experience the most rapid expansion in the history of mankind. In Asian and African cities, in which urbanization is in full swing, the population will increase by several billion. For this reason it will also be necessary to plan a development of urban infrastructures able to support this phenomenon.

While facing this challenge, ecologists, planners, economists and landscapers always tend to consider a particular simplistic relationship between city and nature. In particular, there is always a partial view about the relationship between nature and city, which is most often limited to the role of natural infrastructure, i.e. habitats or natural spaces recreated by human beings, which are rather trivially deemed able to provide users with alleged benefits. Cities offer many economies of scale, reducing the per capita use of some resources.

Several recent conservationists look at the current urbanization of our species with sadness because they claim that this phenomenon results in “the end of nature”, to use the words of Bill McKibben.

This incomplete view of the phenomenon looks more at the results than at the causes. Stating that we have reached a point where every square meter of land and every ecosystem have been altered by human beings and therefore the nature itself no longer exists, is a way to ratify the end of cities and the death of nature, because urban spaces are spaces totally created and designed by humans for themselves.

## 2.2 *Rural and urban resources*

However, considering the city from the point of view of its relationship with natural resources means basing the analysis on a conception of the city as a complex system, which is however primarily artificial. In this way, the urbanized city would end up representing a system having a plurality of relations with the rural outside. These relations between the artificial city size and the natural size of the countryside have always showed to be a long-lasting relationship in terms of input (food, resources, water, energy) and output (goods, services, technology, knowledge, etc.).

As a system that drains, metabolizes, works huge quantities of natural and energy resources, the city has shown the historically entropic character of its artificial structure, which since the beginning has stood at the edge of arable land and has built a relationship of dependency on the surrounding areas. But, it was in the 19th century that the city was transformed from a low entropic dissipative system into a high entropic dissipative system.

This course was part of the second great transition defined by Clive Ponting, characterized by the large-scale consumption of fossil fuels, and linked to the great economic, social and demographic upheavals of the contemporary age. If until 1800 the percentage of the urban population in the world was only 2.5%, at the end of the twentieth century it increased to about half of the total population (Ponting 2007).

This increase led to structural changes of extraordinary importance. The index of Rees (urban ecological footprint) has shown the increased need for resources, during the twentieth century, by the inhabitants of the urban realities of the industrialized areas (from 1 to 4–6 hectares) and at the same time the reduced available production area (from 5 to 1.7 hectares).

In addition, it is estimated that in just 35 years, six billion people, equivalent to the entire world population in 2000, will live in cities. With three-quarters of humanity settled in urban areas—a phenomenon, which can be considered the largest migration in the history of mankind—several critical points will arise. In this timeframe, it will be our task to review the role played by cities in an increasingly populated world.

## 3 URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND ENCLAVES. THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE CONTEMPORARY CITY

### 3.1 *Enclaves and ghettos*

Can we still talk about continuous city when it is taking the shape of residential or commercial enclaves along the great infrastructure, but closed and extremely supervised?

The phenomenon is present—but it is weak in this case in comparison with Los Angeles or some other realities not only in California—and it is well defined in the ‘Geographies of fear’ of Mike Davis. The enclaves, obsessed with security, are a logical evolution of the pilings of monads which characterize contemporary construction. The undifferentiated urban pattern resulting from the sum of basic elementary structures is not the continuous city, and it has nothing to do with ‘Madrid-ciudad lineal’ of Soria y Mata or the Linear City, Sosgorod of Miljutin.

This new dimension of urban settlement also seems quite unrelated to the well-founded principle underlying the idea of the city as a community, as successfully demonstrated by those archaeologists for which the city began to be defined as such when the space between the buildings has taken on meaning, or better when the significance of the relationship spaces began to prevail over the individual buildings. After all, when it is clear that not only monuments but also the open space connected with the mobility infrastructure were able to establish relations of reciprocity, a change took place in the historical dimension of the city, with the establishment of production facilities in the urban context.

### 3.2 *Permanence and transience*

This condition, in the city construction process, evolves through a process of transformation determined by the sequence of additions, differentiations, oppositions, polarities and architectural supplements. However, if we thought of the “theories of permanence” as developed by Marcel Poète (1929) and Pierre Lavedan (1959) and subsequently taken over by Aldo Rossi (1984), the knowledge of the city would become essential for the purpose of understanding and critically decoding the urban form and the aggregative substance of primary and secondary elements of architecture. The disorder and the loss of its formal structure is one of the most striking aspects of the urban settlement crisis and its discontinuous fragmentation. Already 40 years ago, the spreading of buildings on the territory for Konrad Lorenz was among the ‘deadly sins of our civilization’. The constitutive elements of the urban structure as the block, the square, the streets, the orientation and the shape of the structure, the building types, their combinations and ways for land use, are already part of nature and of the characteristics of a place, a city or a part of it. Theory and practice of architectural design are measured with this awareness in the wake of Marcel Poète’s lesson, establishing the urban science underlying the city as the foundation for the study of architecture.

If the word ‘city’ connotes a reality which has changed, should it be set aside? Is it still allowed to define that constitutive nature of the city in the contemporary metropolis?

Why should they be called continuous-city or spread-city? A new lexicon would probably be needed, capable of grasping discontinuity and diversity in the urbanized continuum where the built magma is opposed to new infrastructures, hampers the continuity of green corridors and wide-ranging networks useful to the quality of environment and of living conditions, and neglects the necessity of shaping new landscapes.

### 3.3 *Vision and reality*

However, retrieving the nature of the city means not only giving a morally sustainable share of equipment and urban green areas or an ecologically sustainable share of duplicate elements denoted as natural but completely different from the physical environment of the city. The recent cases of some principles of metropolitan forestation are visionary and remain rather naively linked to a stereotyped concept of nature. It is also true that the pathology of the recent urban condition is very clear, and the diagnosis is equally clear. The therapy and the methods to counter a deterioration, which appears inevitable are not that clear. Understanding the contingent causes is not enough: the abandonment of building continuity for the ‘blocks’ and the ‘fences’; anachronistic standards; sector regulations; the oscillation of priorities between structures and infrastructure, no longer in symbiosis; the rate at which obstacles pile up on the territory, far from explaining potentials and landscapes; the size of interventions, the splitting of initiatives, and so on. Excellence and sporadic high-quality measures are not enough. The contemporary habitats show wastage and redundancies due

to organizational and business models that have a clear innovation potential. Moreover, it is overall not economical.

There is no utopia that is not based on large scales of intervention, or at least common principles, nor is there a reality without utopian vision.

## 4 THE URBAN-PHOBIA OF THE CONTEMPORARY

### 4.1 *The reproduction of nature*

In the present condition it is now recognized that it is no longer the necessary order of nature (logos) that imposes the laws of the *polis*, but it is the *polis* laws which must take responsibility for the fate of nature. Today, the humans' city that was once an enclosed space in the natural world, has replaced nature, which is now reduced to a mere enclosed space in the artificial world of the city (Galimberti 2000).

After all there, is an irreducible duality, a constant conflict, an opposition between the two settlement ways of the human species, i.e. between city and countryside. It is also an ideological fact that has produced several rural and urban settlement patterns throughout history.

But this opposition, in its pure form, has had a definite edge, a certain boundary and a clear border, the one of the walls, which were a necessary element of the historic city. A boundary, the one of the walls, which influenced the shape of the city and has also influenced its density. But the city has crossed the border of its walls and *faubourgs* arose near the walls. In order to survive, it accepted agriculture inside its walls, without giving up the benefits of the countryside: every day, or rather every night, a continuous flow of products was poured into mainstream markets, "bellies" of the city from the surrounding countryside.

The general markets such as *Les Halles* in Paris, protagonist of the novel *The belly of Paris* (1873) by Emile Zola, are the meeting point between city and countryside. The duality city/countryside, rural exterior and urban interior, brings a different dimension of living and production: however not the one between natural and artificial. It should be emphasized that, as a result of the fact that countryside and city are two artificial forms of the territory organization that have undermined the spontaneous and natural harmony of human beings with nature. These two dimensions are both an expression of supremacy capabilities of our species and its ability to imagine and build the future. Two entities forced to live together, even if the countryside can exist without the city, while the latter, until a few decades ago, could almost never disregard the countryside.

### 4.2 *The ideology of nature*

The relationship human-nature has been governed, for us in the West, by two visions of the world: Greek and Judeo-Christian which, in spite of being extremely different from each other, agreed on ruling that nature fell within the sphere of ethics, whose aim was limited to the regulation of relations between people with no extension to the entities of nature. As a matter of fact, the Greeks conceived nature as an immutable order, a horizon not to be crossed, an invincible limit that no human action could infringe. When the Greek culture meets the Judeo-Christian culture, the scenery changes because the biblical religion that views nature as a creature of God, conceives nature as a result of a will: the will of God who created it and the will of human beings to whom nature has been given over to their supremacy. Since then, the meaning of nature is no longer "cosmological" but "anthropological" (Galimberti 2000).

Therefore, when we have to discuss the natural aspects of the city we have to keep in mind that the urbanization scope in recent decades is not the growing expansion of the city (which for the first time exceeds the countryside in terms of population). The most important phenomenon is indeed the progressive disappearance of the countryside: the ground floor is divided between cemented and abandoned soil, while agriculture is reduced; one of the two poles of the dialectics of the humanized spaces disappears, brutally placing the city in front of a nature with no human beings. It is a form of "urban-phobia" (or hatred for the city),



which is a complex feeling tracing its roots back in the 18th century, especially in Rousseau. The growth of the modern urban society enhances this feeling. The contemporary city in some of its aspects is perceived as a place of anti-civilization and anti-human (Cavin 2009).

## 5 THE NATURAL ORDER OF THE CITY

### 5.1 *The natural aspect of urban space*

“Buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception—or rather, by touch and sigh. Architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art the reception of which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction. The laws of its reception are most instructive.” (Benjamin 2008)

Starting from the condition of citizens as users, Kevin Lynch investigated the criteria for the urban image to be assimilated and stored. The very important question established by Lynch is the need to create a systemic language to define, insightfully, the urban form. However, this is discernible exclusively if its reverse shot, the rural environment, is also perceivable.

Currently, this duality is already damaged. In the extensive continuum of a city area it is impossible to find a clear boundary that can define its shape. Therefore, the traditional urban-rural dual structure is not recognizable in its traditional limit. During the past, the danger came from the nature, while nowadays it stems from the human power who tries to prevail on it, crossing all limits, not only by using it, but also exhausting it.

So, this duality must be searched in the relationship between the man-made environment and the abandoned and derelict environment. Large abandoned extensions are as dynamic and necessary, as the destiny of decommissioned micro and macro urban structures. The second duality is in the relationship between two main methods of man-made spaces, the rural and the urban one; it is better that they maintain permeable borders and mutual interference, thus re-establishing dynamics which could contaminate mutually.

The urban explosion, which often manifests in a hostile way, is now identified with the phenomenon of sprawl, which is the formless intrusion of the compact city into the countryside and in replacement of the latter. On the contrary, the rural environment pollution in the city occurs by discontinuous and accidental events, sometimes for a form of satisfaction with the recent environmental recriminations and ecological aspiration of the community. It is a simple aspiration that repeats in a rather sophisticated way a “hyper-naturalized” environment for the anthropic environment, which actually de-naturalizes it instead, because it realizes an “in vitro landscape” which is very inhospitable and little expansive. In other words, from the environmental and urban point of view, the incursion of nature into the city (that is called urban farming), without nostalgic compromises, seems like an evanescent answer to the need for increased quality of life. The clearness and the coherence of the city image become the founding characters to know the urban space. In this sense, there is no difference between the ancient man, who had to re-learn his land through the hunting or war, and the contemporary man trapped into metropolitan traffic; as the ancients, even contemporary men arrange things and landscape names according to functional situations of their location.

### 5.2 *An alternative urban paradigm*

The glorious survival of the city, which is the ecological niche of human species, cannot be realized in case of countryside annihilation: the *reductio ad unum* of forms in human spaces is an assumption (and then consequence) of the city crisis, connected to the other *reductio ad unum*, that is the main reason, i.e. the acceptance of a unique thought as a parameter to rule cities. The identification of parts, design and structure of the city is a necessary precondition to define the elements of identity (physical aspect of object), structure (relational aspect) and meaning (practical and emotional). In the recent condition of the city, these identities are not the same ordering elements of the medieval city (cathedral), renaissance (municipal building), nineteenth-century (factory), or modern era (industry).



Figure 1. Cape Town, South Africa, 2010.

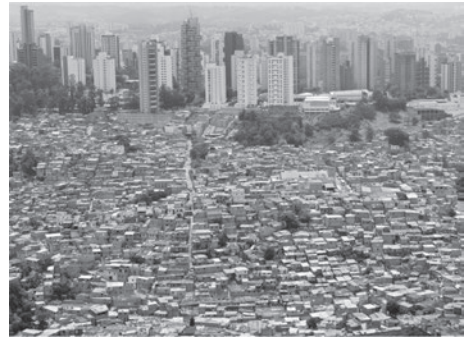


Figure 2. Mumbai, India, 2013.



Figure 3. Nairobi, Kenya, 2010.



Figure 4. Sao Paulo, Brazil, 2013.



Figure 5. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2016.



Figure 6. Mexico City, Mexico, 2013.



Figure 7. New York, 2015.



Figure 8. Hong Kong, 2012.

The physical identities that we can find and recognize within the contemporary city and characterizing its natural order are various and they all refer to the need to organize the contemporary city. These identities can be related to the infrastructure system that physically organizes the local engineering and the layout of the city, through a mutual incursion of the nature into the city and of the city into the countryside.

The paths (all the public or private connective network of an area: pedestrian and automobile streets, railways, canals and so on) represent the connection able to determine the natural structure of the city. The same applies to the limits, no longer those geometrically defined by the physical structure of a wall, but rather those borders that have certain characters of discontinuity (boundaries, shores, building's lines of continuity, railway mobility areas etc.); they are potentially capable to adopt and duly describe the new urban landscapes of metropolitan cities. It is the new Landmarks that, as a physical structure, are able to receive the reference role in the order of urban and rural landscape (punctual signals composed by a physical object: a building, a signboard etc.). Certainly, the urban hubs are new condensers during the rituals of users behavior (a widening, a square, but also a crossroads, a crossover and so on). Finally, it is also the neighborhoods, as defined urban structures (similar parts—two dimensional—of a landscape with morphological and building characters), not only for their functional status, but also for some settlements and formal aspects.

Re-conceptualizing these elements of the contemporary city means regaining current and fundamental elements of architecture, first of all restoring a new idea for the behaviors regarding the use of space.

## 6 A POSSIBLE WAY OUT: THE DESIGN OF THE CITY BY PARTS

### 6.1 *An integrated architectural and urban approach*

The basic question, which we are called to answer today, is the general role of the incisiveness of the architectural action in the present condition. For too long, the architectural practice has been developing a visual aesthetic, on a purely formal conception of the problems. Visual strength tends to exclude consideration of the structural aspects around urban and rural environment, where visual is not considered on a par with some historic, social and economic criteria for a complete outlook on the state of the city (Aymonino 1993).

On one side we still covet the single building as a chance for self-expression. On the other side, when a project has a wide range of issues, these are broken out into statistical entities with little grasp of the overall framework, with little understanding of its implications and its limitlessness, resulting from the intense cohesion of well structured parts. We need to look for new strategies that allow us to face new challenges. Greater than ever before, our challenge is to solve even increasing needs of our complex society for which no previous model exists.

The design of the city by parts can be considered a fairly clear assumption of any problem arising from the complex structure of the recent urban condition that involves, at different scales, both the knowhow of architecture and town planning as disciplines.

It is however evident that the problem of planning in the city is rather vague even if one accepts the method of the construction by parts and even if these parts are well-defined by their being physical parts. At any rate, to make the question clearer it would be better to redefine the sense of the parts forming the city and, above all, the quality and the structure of the new parts that make up the new town. If one rejects this kind of redefinition, or analysis of the quality of structure or dimension of such parts, one must accept all physical facts as elements of the city, without any qualitative discrimination.

It is possible to agree with this thesis on condition that it may introduce a judgement system, able to include both one physical part of the city and the city as a set of physical parts.

It might not be feasible to broaden this kind of judgement on the physical part of the urban settlement in order to include the whole city as a single structure, although it happens to consider a single building as a defined whole. This kind of paradox has an opposite one. The position of those who conceive and plan the city as a building is equivalent to the position of those who consider every building as a micro-city.

Anyway both of these tendencies are inclined to reject a functionalist approach. In fact, if we look at a construction as a neutral “container”, as a space set to define the largest possible number of uses, we generally see that the building is an answer to problems arisen by the request for those uses which are still internal, in particular: these uses, although existing in the city, find in the building a condition for autonomy, in order to define an undifferentiated receptacle of a specific activity which may even not be permanent.

On the other side, if we considered the building as a multi-functional system, we would be able to admit a feverish construction of a presence of the building in the city by means of an overlapping of uses, recognizable inside the urban body by their own formal structure

It is possible to better define the relation city as a building or, as well, the relation city as an artefact, and consequently a part of the city as an independent artefact. It is, in short, a matter of considering a building as an individual and the problem of the role of a part in relation with the whole of parts forming the city (Polesello 1968).

## 6.2 *The order of a multi-scalar problem*

The design of the city is regarded both as an urban and architectural problem. It has been known that town planning is usually addressed to the general structure of the city, while architecture design, through a correct composition of the structures forming the city, is usually intended for stabilizing the relation between soil as use and physical body (a building, a square, a street, and so on). These parts of cities built around a public building or public space, are easily recognizable since their urban structure is clearly affected by this presence. If it is possible to take the category of use as a fixed and unchangeable principle, it could be possible to grant both the institution of a metric common to both scales of planning, the town planning scale and the architectural one, and the consistency with the double value system they involve.

Of course, these criteria are not adequate enough to develop this theoretical assumption. In other words the link between scalar use and physical structure does not develop in a linear way, and, if necessary, confirms Hegel’s principle that continuous modifications in the quantity of homogeneous elements involve their quality (Polesello 1968).

But it is also true that from the theoretical point of view, therefore, it does not matter which scale is used thanks to the two-way relation: the urban sense of a building, and the spatial reason of the city (or part of it). But rather than two value systems, this is a problem of metrics which must grant the knowledge on any value concerning the city and its design. If we can interpret the part of the urban structure as a whole, we can operate and act according to one scale only.

## 6.3 *Two aspects of designing the city by parts.*

There might be two aspects that can help us to explain the problem concerning the design of the city by parts.

The first aspect concerns the relation between the object of architecture as an aggregation of elementary units and the existing city. It is true that this problem arises only for some architects that include in the context of the real city a module as a component of a “machine à habiter” (Le Corbusier 2007) or, conversely, the criterion of “building technology” (Archigram 1999). However we can find today in the recent production of the urban design some of these aspects, such as grouping pattern of the building cells, which are real numeral elements of the whole system. It is also true that since these patterns of building organization are based on a functioning complexity very close to urban complexity, they are proposed as a comprehensive alternative to the cities, or as a partial alternative concerning only the class of residence-service equipments.

All of these kinds of examples can neither exhaust nor show the meaning of the idea of possible part of the cities. These structures in the city when considered as a building or as a part of the city are foreign to the city itself, or coexist with it at the most. Their being foreign to the city regards not only the status of independence that consists of a high level of

autonomy from the other parts of the city, as an enclave (Davis 1992), but priority from the unwanted rejected formal relation with the existing city, with its artificial nature of human settlement. It is really strange how today that experiences, even more advanced than those proposed some years ago by the utopian vision of Archigram and Metabolism, do not, or cannot, give up the problems of formal perceptions, connected with the use of these technologies, and do not look, on the contrary, for more sophisticated technological uses not involving such a problem. These kinematic devices by the modern and recent technological statements are involved in coping with the nature by reproducing it *in vitro*, in the guise of comfort, sustainability, ecology, and so on.

The second aspect concerns the relation between (a part of) the city and the nature itself. This can no longer be considered an aesthetical relation, let alone the idea to transfer mechanically a part of the natural environment. Said otherwise, this relation should be found in a manner that attempts to address the ways in which architecture and the construction of space can be aesthetically environmental, that is to say not merely the one containing the notion belonging to the ordinary conception of nature, such as the ecological attitude on managing the eco-friendly structures, or maybe emphasizing the green approach to the urban planning. On the contrary, working around the authentic role of Nature means decoding the artificial configuration of the urban context by its “natural arrangements”.

In this way, we must face a very interesting problem: if, in a well-balanced development of towns and territories, together with the targets of planned social and economic balance, we considered as extremely interesting also a suitable relation between natural and artificial landscapes, and then introduced the idea of site, existing town structure, typology and morphology of the different urban elements as material foe and of the planning process. All these materials belong to the artificial structure of the city, and here we can find the nature of human settlement, such as the built space as a physic structure of built architecture or the free space as the natural landscape. In the state of current city environment, it could be useful today to go backwards through the process leading from the city to the architecture and from the architecture to the architectures, trying to find out the deep roots and the connections linking together the architecture in the cities and by means of these connections to define, although partially, the urban problem. The relation between the essence of a territory and the essence of its building becomes a symbolic expression of all opportunities and implicit relations of human settling, the definition of its potential being a project in the future (Canella 1974).

## 7 AN OPEN CONCLUSION

Without massive scale investment in development, the city will continue to stumble along in its state of mediocre urbanism and public architecture whilst blindly eroding its setting.

The city spreads and extends all the way to the point where, while it tends to cover the entire orb of the planet, it loses its properties as a city, and, of course with them, those properties that would allow it to be distinguished as a structure to settle a community.

That should not be related only to a common sense of the ecological aspects of the urban environment, if it is possible to re-conceptualize it in an age of urban sprawl, multiple usage of public space and proliferation of the sites of political, social and cultural expression. To sum up, this essay tries to outline the paradoxical concept of “Nature” in the “artificial” context of the city. Urban activists continue to believe that the ideal of “city beautiful” and “garden cities” and most recently, the project of “urban renaissance” and “new urbanism”, implies a return to the conservative conception of urban life, although history shows that building sociality through civic engagement between public and private space is one of the attempts at managing public space. From the classical Greek philosophers, theorists of urban modernity such as Benjamin, Simmel, Mumford, Lefebvre and Jacobs, and contemporary urban visionaries such as Sennett, Sandercock and Zukin, all suggest a strong link between urban public space and urban civic virtue as a way to reconsider the “Nature” of the urban environment. The reconstruction of modern town according to the morphologic and geographic parameters does not constitute a science fiction’s vision. From this point of view,

assembly quotation and reduction of problems to their paradoxical limits are not ingredients of a strange immoral prophetic flight. On the contrary, the presence of reality and the necessity to propitiate future by provoking it too, justify in this case the recovery of some elements of the vision by reading the city as an entity made by parts.

Working in the city by its constituting parts means recognising firstly the nature of the city, then the importance of the natural settlement as a human artefact in the artificial environment of the city, and finally the building up of a single thought that articulates a sense of nature in the meaning of space, valid both for architecture and town planning.

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