

WORDS ABOUT CITY

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City is practically a human swarm, the place where one strives for a reasonable lifestyle, the nest where he feels at home, where temperature reaches its optimum, where he can store products, where he works, where he loves, where he raises his children. Concrete, bitumen, steel, glass, cables and pipes, various networks crossing one another, eventually achieving a coherent functional infrastructure unit. The neon light, commercials that simply attract and delight our eyes, restaurants, exhibitions, Christmas presents offered from the heart, or even dirty rooms full of millions of harlots... People, interests, communication and a web of interrelations everywhere... It smells like people, poor communities spreading a natural agglomerated gutter flavour or richness with fine perfumes and tobacco, luxurious motorcars supported by who knows from, what and how...

There are people mistakably believing that man and the cities he built are the essence of the world and that there is nothing he cannot solve. Reality, however, proves to be quite different since man and its cities are just a mere irregularity of the ecosphere, mere human nests, for man remains, after all, an animal species among primates, as dependent on the environment as any other organism.

Urban atmosphere, people, sparrows, ivy crawling on concrete walls, buildings, arranged spaces, noisy crowded markets where people come and go, from and to all four cardinal points. Urban centres are the environment by excellence dominated by the human presence. Smaller or larger buildings, monumental churches centuries old, new houses and blocks of flats, streets, highways, parking lots everywhere, people and cars, honks and motor noise, music coming from the open street terraces. Urban centres nowadays dominate human life, while urbanization process is on its way to the future.

Urbanized areas stand for the space where the great majority of us spend our entire life since we live, we work in the city, and we travel between cities. At the same time, people who live in the outskirts of the city, rural communities are still connected to the urban by their administrative needs, education, health, informational fluxes, scientific progress, industrial products and open market.

The urban area is the place where most of the modern world inhabitants spend their lives. The modern world means living in the city, most of people's lives being spent there. Urban architecture, a most too obvious value for us and urban commodity, are part of our daily life, along with phonic and atmospheric pollution and urban stress. People tend to forget that their life is completely dependant on the space outside the city, on the rural and forestry areas, on the oceans and on our planet great energetic cycles, on the climatic stability and on the capacity of environment to produce supplies, clean water, energy, to absorb and neutralize waste and pollutants produced by human activity.

The existence of the urban area, though small sized, as compared to the remaining area, is essential for the protection of the environment. Its huge absorption of resources from the natural areas, forests, marshes and grasslands, the pollution it causes to air and water are negative effects that affect the area far outside the urban territorial limits.

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Where does the clear water come from? Is it from some accumulation lake or from some river nearby? Is it possible that sparkling water comes from a spring somewhere and then bottled and transported to us? Our food, oranges, apples, watermelons, meat, poultry and oceanic fish, coffee and sugar, milk and cheese, flour, p alinca (spirit made out of plum distillation) and beer, nothing is produced in the city, but they "come from somewhere". Where do we eliminate our dejections (defecations), urine, and the waste remained after "using the food", drugs composites, and so forth? Well, everything goes into the waters nearby the cities, waters that downstream are used as the main clear water source by the inhabitants of other cities.

Human settlements, be them urban or rural, become singular and unique through their history, architectural style, monuments, statues, regional traditions, local specific culture and by the specific atmosphere created by various interdependencies. There is a certain social coherence between the inhabitants who know each other and coexist in a particular city, families that used to mingle for centuries, but once with globalization, travelling, and the more frequent change of homes and workplaces, the interpersonal becomes quite superficial and rather based on the essence of the moment or on the current day's agenda: *common interest cooperation today, tomorrow we'll see*. The model of modern life needs a strong adaptability so as to discover and use all opportunities, in order, maybe, to size each changing "the window of opportunity", windows which remain open only for a short period of time and which do not allow much space for thinking.

In small communities, all individuals know each other; they also know about each other's positions, everyone's history within the group. Once the dimensions of a human community amplify, the population increase makes the conscious interrelation between one individual of the community and all the others within it impossible. Beside the gradual in-depth social relationships between some of the individuals, and some others which are only tangential, there is a large social group which has no communication relationships with other individuals of any type, expressing just neutrality and maybe indifference towards them. The sense of identity and belonging to a community appears to be more powerful in case of the small, isolated rural communities, where the interdependency between inhabitants becomes more evident and where "mouth to mouth circulation of events" or "gossip" stands as a strong factor of influence, element which is no longer present in the case of larger communities.

In the case of urban areas there is a multilayered human society reflecting rich families along with poor ones, luxury areas along with pauperism and despair. In respect to rural areas where asset discrepancies are not that obvious at first sight, in the cities we can clearly notice the small group of the rich and of the potent, followed by more or less consistent layers of various levels of wealth or poverty. Even though it is generally agreed that there should be a reasonable split of assets and of resources, the people involved tend to change their minds when it comes to gaining. Still when it comes to diminishing claim, all the possible reasons for making it "impossible to be" are immediately invoked.

Modern societies display certain permeability between layers, but the real chances for success are a lot more significant when "one is born in the perfect place". Eventually, it resorts to human rights, the right to education, health, happiness etc.; still, we have to admit though the existence of a gap between these theoretical rights and practical reality, in which conditions, specific material and sometimes cultural status of birth preset the future of a certain individual.

City becomes attractive through its own opportunities and the wide range of possibilities. Yet, the quality of urban life becomes more and more affected by urban stress, agglomeration, traffic jams, pollution, and an absurd haste. One wonders whether people do

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realize they live near a road, full of cars, a crossroad surrounded by significantly polluted air and they are all exposed to this poison. How could they ultimately try to brush their teeth, eat organic food, live a reasonably good life, if their environment is mainly made of pollution, thus resulting in a less happier, shorter and filled with diseases life for them and their families, as well as their children?

At a world scale, at least 40% of the diseases are produced directly by environment pollution, and the incidence environment-related diseases, especially those caused by chemicals, pesticides or combustion compounds, continuously increases.

Air quality is low in the cities, while automobiles increasing in number every day render traffic jams even more frequent, therefore causing on the roads that were not previously designed for such a large number of vehicles. Irregularly parked cars leave no open spots for pedestrians to circulate on; the energy consumed by the means of transportation is continuously increasing, while the more polluted air we breathe determines much more severe and aggressive respiratory diseases. Redesigning markets and pedestrian streets including shops, restaurants and coffee bars, where circulation of supplying vehicles is made by night, represents a method by which at least the more "touristy" central city areas are being given a break, thus creating a "free space" to inhabitants whose children are not anymore obliged to choke from cars smoke, to develop allergies, asthma, pulmonary cancer anymore.

The quality of the products you touch and use everyday in your house is relative. All furniture is built by clay and other substances that are vaporized in the air. What are the cleaning products used for laundry, dishwashing, and what are their obvious effects? What is the quality of all plastic material that we use, are radiations of TV and computer screens reasonably limited? What are clothes, shoes made of? What do we use for wrapping food? How much of the food is real food, how do they regulate the colours of food products, how are juices made, how come food does not go bad for such a long period of time, is it good to eat all these things?

The moment you notice a new industrial plant, which you know is a source of pollution, and you can see it so near your block, what can you do about it? You can ask yourself, is it worth staying here anymore, or should I move? Is it the case that "*the aggressive investment to both people and environment*" should not be made, or at least to be made in an ecological and sustainable manner? How is it to live with your family, children or friends in an area where you certainly do know that in a sunny morning you can see from the window a huge "smoke cloud"? Could we live a contaminated area? Could you make future plans, still living in these areas? Could we have the certainty of safety in case of any accident, harmful and pollution substances leaking, or an explosion which you can never exclude? How high is the mortality rate determined by pollution, irradiation, cancer, how is our body's resistance affected and eventually what are the chances for human life anymore?

When you walk in the streets of your native city, when you look at the monumental church that rises to the sky, hundreds of years old buildings, maybe it crosses your mind that these were the streets your ancestors walked in, these were the paths of your grandparents in love, two happy young people then, hand in hand, in a quiet spring evening, or, even a few decades later, walking through fallen leaves, sizing the moment. You did not know them, but you know they existed sometime in the past, if they had not existed, you could have not told their now. And then were wars and famine, rationalized food, applauses in the dark, each period with its "*guru of the time*", and other better times or just their hope, Christmas evenings promising a new beginning, while the buildings and streets of the city remained, such as a steady infrastructure where people live their temporary, temporal, passing existence.

But, how much does urban life change, in time? That, which used to be once only a multitude of constructions, now it is full of cables, networks, and global communication. Could our ancestors even imagine that if there is any event happening somewhere on another continent, we can watch it at home, in colours, sounded, live, on TV? Or, that we could have in our pockets, something small-sized, let us call it "*cell phone*", allowing us to communicate to our friends anytime, be them anywhere in the world? Did they ever think it would ever be possible to fly over the oceans?

In the past, it used to be clear who belonged to the castle and who did not. The attack, as well as the defence materialized in walls, guns, warriors. Now "*cities*" cannot define their community anymore, who belongs to the inner space between their walls and who should be outside, which are the legitimate interests of an individual or of a group, and which are those that can undermine the future. Which are the best fitted investments for the community, and which are those that only lie plunder the local inhabitants, spoil the resources, cause pollution and then move to areas still unaffected by degradation.

We wonder what the future of the cities would be like. Would it become a levelled uniformity in the globalization process? Would this mean a loss of local identity? Or is it possible that everything would turn concrete, steel, aluminium or neon? If we visit cities, except for some eventually preserved historical centres, we notice, no matter where we look, the specific atmosphere of "*modernity*", a certain type of fast-food, certain brands of hypermarkets, coffee-shops, cars or clothes. Is this perhaps the irreversible transformation of localities into pieces of "*the global city*"? By this kind of standardization and uniformity, the surprise is left outside, but where could we find the charm of discovery, of the natural local, of the past, which would be the support of present, should this withdraw in museums or within the pages of history books?

It would not be appropriate for urban areas to be named urban ecosystems, due to the complete dependency of the urban areas to the extra-urban areas, forests, watercourses, cultivated land, pastures, hayfields and others. Without the outer areas, without the landscape, as a provider of the resources needed, the city cannot exist. Much more, any ecosystem has its own self-balance, which is not the case here, the specific being prompted towards growth, growth, growth...

There is a continuous increase in the size of urban agglomerations. Therefore, their "weight" leaves its marks on landscape and environment, both through the absorption of energy and resources and through pollution emissions. How could landscape, nature, biodiversity as well as ecosystems defend against such an increasing overexploitation? Could it be possible that love and more and more children cause more damage to the world than wars? Even if it sounds well, perhaps the well-known phrase "*make love not war!*", does not essentially mean a good thing, at least in the case that "*love*" is not made according to the simultaneous control of worldwide birth rate and the city and territorial development partly covers the coordinates of sustainable development.

This thorough discourse, simply entitled "*words about city*" is nothing but an in-depth reflection upon the major issues that the city implies in its development as an integrant element of territory and environment and upon the reasonable resolutions so as to create cities of the future, without being later ashamed of our work.