

# TOWARDS AN ECUMENIAL OR A CATASTROPHIC CITY? A DESIGN, ECUMENE AND HUMANITARIAN DISCUSSION

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*Abstract:* This paper is an attempt to explore the interplay of humanity and science to respond to novel globalization processes in the face of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The human situation is presented through two schisms: the human-nature and the socio-cultural. Sustainability and ecumene studies are proposed as the new aggregated science fields aiming at solutions for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ecumene studies respond to the need to create a planetary intellectual infrastructure (a planetary brain) that “thinks” in an ecumenial way (beyond border conviviality) for a global transformation and reconciliation of human differences in/for a cosmopolitan perspective. Ecumenic, humanitarian and design movements/studies are considered the main areas of ecumene studies as an inter- and transdisciplinary field, with the city (in all its forms) as its core platform. The city as a human extension and dissipative system reveals a duality since its origin, coming to a peak of conviviality as it will comprise two third of humanity by 2050. This peak will either lead to higher forms of organization (anastrophe), or to collapse (catastrophe). The paper presents the “ecumenial city” or Ecumenopolis (city of Human Rights) as a anastrophic future projection and a call for everyone, emphasizing both a destiny and small actions for activating transformation and reconfiguration in times of approaching the peak.

*Keywords:* ecumene studies, ecumenial city, beyond border conviviality, global monitoring, new research agenda.

## INTRODUCTION

In the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with globalization, the Anthropocene awareness and the 2030 SDG Agenda, research and education as well as the meaning of school and University as

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institutions and their place within society are in a time of change. The emergence and quicker consolidation of Sustainability as a field of research and education should be considered as the most relevant aspect on that matter. Sustainability is greatly an ideology and a set of practices (in which the 3 “r” motto plays a relevant role) built on the awareness of a problem (environment/ecology) and its framed articulation with specific dimensions: firstly, environment, economics and the social; and, more recently, governance. As a result, the fields of action, research and education were consolidated. Sustainability created a recognizable inter- and transdisciplinary movement responsible for synergies between natural, social and political sciences. Finally, through sustainability studies, new relevant meaning was brought to research and education, as well as to schools and universities. This has paved the way for a long-needed reconciliation between humans and nature, as well as for the relation between universities, the society and the individuals.

Nevertheless, even if we may be tempted to reduce everything to sustainability as such, and if sustainability really is a fantastic, broad field, this reduction can also be criticized as a way to uncover or simplify other complex problems. We do have to accept that this field builds on ecologies as the core problem and aims at the reconciliation of humankind and nature as a way to resolve the criticism of a cultural pattern of centuries of distancing one from the other. Accepting this, on the other side of the spectrum of sciences (the social and political ones), there is, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a deep awareness of another core problem: difference/citizenship. General inequality; stigmatized, voiceless or unrepresented social groups; racism and xenophobia; territorial, national, religious and ethnic conflicts... basically, the “fear of small numbers” (Appadurai 2006) and its relation to large numbers!<sup>1</sup> Only with good will, these may be considered as core issues within the field of sustainability. If sustainability is a strong response to the ecological schism, we still need a strong response to the cultural schism. This response could be the awareness of “difference” as a bio-socio-economic-political and cultural construction, enabling its reconciliation, overcoming centuries of strategies of distancing by



the implementation of a new global citizenship deal. However, it is important to consider awareness only is not enough.

These problems are very complex and have been tackled in many ways. We propose that in comparison with sustainability, the moment is still more of a criticism (in which gender and postcolonial/decolonial studies have a relevant role) than of reconciliation. The radical academic questioning brings a set of critical concepts to the fore: plural ontologies and epistemologies and its replicas in juridical pluralism in Law, ontologies in Anthropology, and others. This inherits a consequent crisis of representation and dialogue, demonstrating a clear emphasis on a criticism that still emphasizes difference instead of exploring ways towards reconciliation in a conviviality model.

There are some movements/knowledges which reveal attempts to involve differences in a polylogue, highlighting conviviality as the main goal. We consider that three main movements should be taken into consideration: the ecumenic movement, the humanitarian movement and the design movement. The ecumenic movement (ecumenic studies and activism) builds on religious studies and promotes cultural translations (for instance through diatopic hermeneutics), which relates to core issues in Anthropology, Sociology and Cultural Geography. The humanitarian movement directly connects with law (particularly human rights) and, also, to a “hospitality” tradition towards the “other” (altruism, misericordia, charity, patronage, beneficence, philanthropy, humanitude and so forth); playing a relevant role which is supported by a set of organizations and practices of aid and cooperation anchored in “being there” and empathy. Besides, this second movement tackles issues from a series of disciplines, in an inter- and transdisciplinary perspective: from medicine, nursing and engineering to anthropology, administration, political sciences and international relations. Finally, the design movement is related to products, services and building realities (solutions) in a design for all, or, universal design perspectives which facilitate the integration of differences in flexible, modular, (un)folding, transforming or origami solutions of shaping spaces and products. Furthermore, the design of music, dance and arts in general is of great relevance, as they have been one of the first triggers for



gathering difference – a fundamental element for the aggregation in an empathic way of large numbers. To sum up, if sustainability studies aim at the reconciliation of human and nature, we propose ecumene studies<sup>2</sup> (as suggested here with a focus on cultural translations & conviviality modes; humankind & human rights and design for all & transformational design), aiming at the reconciliation of human differences in/for a cosmopolitan perspective. Time is scarce, and if we, as human kind, want to participate and influence the ongoing high complexity and mainly stochastic change, there is an urge to create a planetary intellectual infrastructure (a planetary brain) that “thinks” in an ecumenial way. The Thomas Theorem, “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Merton 1968: 473), enable believing into our capability of change. However, no individual or government or even scientists and science per se are able to save the world: we will need a new generation thinking in sustainable and ecumenial ways, which is an urgent call to our schools, universities and research centers in order to become transformational learning communities of practices (Seixas, Lobner 2018; Seixas, Lobner 2020) for achieving a qualitative change in the next 25 years. This, we argue, is possibly our last chance.

Hence, ecumene studies (as inter- and transdisciplinary field) should grow in a parallel way to sustainability studies as learning communities of interests and practices that tackle the two main criticisms in a solutions-targeting perspective: the distancing between the human animal and nature and the distancing between human bio-cultural differences. Following this agenda, this text proposes an application of these ecumene studies by discussing the possibility of the ecumenial city or Ecumenopolis (Dioxiadis 1961, 1968, 1974). Cities are human cultural products, built to enhance cultural translations and the conviviality of differences in an ecologic and economic adjustment. The success of cities and, at the same time, their catastrophic possibilities (almost always imminent), stage them as a core issue in ecumene studies<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, we argue that cities evolution indicates the proximity of a peak and a bifurcation in their trajectory as conviviality solutions.



## THE CITY: A VERY RECENT, FRAGILE AND RESILIENT HUMAN EXTENSION

The human family (genus homo) is around 3 million years old, our subspecies (homo sapiens sapiens) around 100.000 years old, agriculture between 7.000 and 10.000 years old, and the emergence of the first cities goes back no longer than 7.000 years. If we use the reference of a 24hour day (clock time), the first city emerged only by 10.20pm, considering our subspecies time frame (100.000 years), or, in the latter 3,36 minutes of the day in the time frame of the genus homo (3 million years). This means we have been nomads for the longest period of human existence. Cities are cultural products, human extensions (Hall 1976) and a temporospatial “anomaly” (Gallopín 2020), through which we ourselves as human kind tried and still continue trying to solve a crucial problem: the conviviality of difference. As open systems in the face of the diversity possibilities of the world, cities are perhaps the most amazing human cultural product, presenting conviviality solutions under continuous test and always on the edge of destruction. Hence, cities are a metaphor of the human in the world: recent, fragile, always transforming itself and amazing in its possibilities of creation upon diversity.

Indeed, a city is a system of conviviality of cultural differences, by which alliances overcame blood (kinship); and by which work (interests) complexified and even overcame alliances towards individualism. It is a system of aggregation and avoidance of aggression by which walls surpassed distance; and ideology complexified and also substituted walls towards immaterial society. It is a system in which indifference is constantly competing with “difference” (with indifference and difference as emancipatory processes in a circular way).

Most likely, the archetype is the reflex that protected the face, and the reactive “eye closing” before an immediate danger, or the adrenaline boost for preparing to fight by oncoming sight of any different group. Thereafter, this has been transposed and mitigated by the several types of walls and distances that constitute architecture and design in general, enhancing relaxation, potential free thinking, safe sleep and cultural



expansion. Through these mechanisms the “minimal critical distance”<sup>4</sup> (Sozca n/d) that dictated unavoidable physical struggle in most of the cases, became latent and greatly inactive. Clothes, distances, furniture, walls or any other design processes enabled and facilitated mutual recognition, enough indifference to establish an active tolerance space. As such, cities are core human design products for cultural translation, enhancing enough distance and proximity or “humanitude” (Klopfenstein 1980; Jaquard 1989; Testard 2015) for the subsequent “being there” in a face-to-face situation that allows the negotiation of rights regarding the several differences. If this is true, design is needed for mutual recognition as much as for the establishment of regular negotiations of rights in a dual process: a “safe close distance” to open up to humanitude (they are human as ourselves) and a capability for a safe and extended dialogue (translating traditions), as well as for the negotiation of rights regulating differences.

Cities are, therefore, the evidence of how design, humanitarian and ecumene knowledges are put together. Nevertheless, every time a system of conviviality is established, whatever it is, it is never for too long. First of all, it may fail for several internal reasons. But, if it works, the city will be challenged by its own success, attracting migration flows that will destabilize the conviviality model achieved. This is perhaps the main reason that explains that a city was – and still is – considered in an ambivalent way: both as light and shadow, as progress and success, as well as fail and fall, as sign of the beauty and the beast. In 2007, cities reached a milestone – the number of people in urban areas overtook the number of people in rural settings. It is expected that in 2050, more than 2/3 of the world population will live in cities (around 7 billion people) and by 2100, it will reach 85 per cent. The urban planet evidences that – despite all the historical situations – cities (besides their instability) became resilient solutions for conviviality and, as such, should be tackled as the most relevant output for conviviality, and for the overcoming of both the ecological and the cultural schisms.



## CITIES AS LIGHT AND SHADOW: DIFFERENCE AND INDIFFERENCE, EUTOPIAS AND DISTOPIAS, DESIRE AND FEAR

The ambivalence of the city may be seen as an expression of its fragility and instability and of a conviviality solution always on the edge of its possibilities. Meanwhile, its permanence seems to evidence it as the best solution possible. We can assess this ambivalence of the city both through humanistic research and through the concept of dissipative systems from physics. Within this section, we argue that the model of conviviality that we call city, as a non-equilibrium and self-organized open system, is reaching a critical moment in which ambivalences turn into strong fluctuations: a peak. This will result in a new qualitative regime of higher organization (anastrophe) or of less organization (catastrophe). This result may not be perceived as a fate to catastrophe through circular time (in which a systole follows a diastole) or as a fate to anastrophe through time as linear progress (in which a higher level will always be achieved) or as mere serendipity through time as a set of hazards, non-controlled events and negative circumstances. All these concepts of time play a role as they are part of us, the human kind, and through self-fulfilling and self-denying (self-defeating or even suicidal) prophecies (Merton 1968) we do create non-linear self-reinforcement variables in the internal processes of our models of conviviality: the city. We will never know how the story will end, nevertheless, we are the time! However, we should understand that we are facing a peak, that anastrophe and catastrophe are on sight and that we are playing a relevant role in shaping our future (through anticipation, expectation, potentiality, hope and destiny) (Bryant, Knight 2019). The stories about how we reached the peak are, in fact, stories on knowledge and its consequences. This is exactly what this is all about: if we are not able to use our incredible human knowledge, we will face hopeless consequences.



*A narrative journey on cities' duality*

Regarding humanistic research, throughout time several narratives addressed the city as a problem. In order to make sense of these narratives we propose to explore them in four main moments: *a)* the origin; *b)* the searching for a format; *c)* the duality awareness and *d)* the socialization for catastrophe.

*a) The origin.* The bible has two narratives referring to the first cities. In fact, one addresses the first city (Enoch) and the second, the first world city (Babylonia). Both stories tackle knowledge and its consequences. In both cases, cultural difference plays a crucial role. The first narrative is about Caim and Abel: a story of two brothers, although “brothers” may only be a metaphor. Abel was a nomad shepherd, probably using land as a free common resource; while Caim was a settled farmer, probably proudly working on a land that he considered of his own: two radical different ways of life, creating problems one to another by living side by side (the “brotherhood”). Radical difference was resolved by violence (the imperialistic agriculture expelled the shepherds) and afterwards, Caim, the fratricide, founded the first city, Enoch. This story reveals a struggle between two modes of conviviality and the success of agricultural imperialistic urban sedentarism in the face of nomadism and common resource pools. The second narrative addresses the first world city: Babylonia, mentioned through the Babel tower and city. If the story of Abel and Caim pinpoints the limits of difference to enroll city life, the Babel story tackles the boundaries of internal difference that may jeopardize the stability of conviviality within the city model. Babel seems to refer to Babylonia, the first world city of the ancient world. Many different people have been attracted by this city, for which reason it grew enormously and differences were integrated, evidenced through the use of the same language. In this case, it seems that the city failed due to its success: there was a limit to the integration of differences. As a result, the city fell into violence, differences were scattered in space and again, everyone condemned to its own “difference” and, therefore, to translation. We are, again, facing knowledge and its consequence. The creation of a city that includes differences through a unique tower (design)





and the knowledge of one single language (ecumene) has not been enough to establish stable rights (humanitarian action) that enable the avoidance of violence. This evidences the difficulty of cities as a stable model of conviviality and identify construction and destruction, indifference and difference as a cycle characteristic for cities.

*b) The searching for a format.* We, as a species (in a phylogenesis compressed in a clock time day), were nomads for around 22.30h in a 24h reference. Meanwhile, if we compress the 7.000 years of the story of cities in the same clock time day, up to the last 45 minutes of the day cities have been part of a rural world and were greatly dependent on it. They were dependent, therefore, on a social contract in which the great majority of people accepted to work for the city without living in it. As such, cities were kind of a cherry on the top of the cake. The stories of the bible evidenced the acceptable moral regime of a city within a rural dependency: being closed to several differences and establishing indifference in terms of rights only for a few. This situation may explain why – at least since Plato and until the industrial revolution – cities were a very important subject of thought: addressing the relation with resources (if they should be commons or not and to whom); the social relations (children, women and men; land owners, artisans and others); political regimes; etc. Plato wrote the Republic in Athens in 380 B.C., and for 1.800 years, the writings on cities boomed in search for the adequate format, although the main variable was unavoidable: the city was dependent on the rural world. These writings dealt with the duality between a eutopia and a dystopia, usually trying to describe the good city, the perfect city, the happy city (eutopia) and, as such, always implying an implicit comparison (and sometimes not so much implicit) as its opposite: dystopia. A very large list evidences this quest for a format: i) Thomas Morus, *Utopia* 1516; ii) Philip Sidney, *The Old Arcadia* 1580; iii) Thomas Campanela, *City of Sun* 1613-14; iv) Charles Fourier, *Phalanstery. Writings* 1808.

*c) The duality awareness.* In the 19th century, the West experienced a period of great rural exodus and consequent urbanization as the new paradigm that substituted around 7.000 years rural hegemony and dependence. The previous unavoidable

constant variable changed and, in course of that, the city as a model of conviviality. Furthermore, the city of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is not so small and as such, it is not as dominated by its boundary effects (the rural context) as the previous forms of cities. The industrial city created a turmoil and a reversal in the rural-urban relation, creating a dependence of the agricultural-rural settlements on the urban demand and market. The representation of the city, throughout the 19th century, oscillates between a positive and a negative view and this is very visible if we use literature as a corpus of analysis. The duality of the city is represented in several literary works, and such literary awareness precedes while already being a sociological representation. Four examples from the 19th century serve to make our point: i) Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus* 1818; ii) Edgar Allan Poe, *The Man in the Crowd* 1840; iii) Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mister Hyde* 1886; iv) Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 1890-91.

All the stories take place in London, being limited to that city, except in the case of *Frankenstein*, which has Geneva and the rest of the world as a reference. *Frankenstein* is a narrative about science (specifically the biological sciences) and the city and their overlapping positive and negative relationships in the construction of a new planet, of promises and monsters. New sciences enable the production of hybrid beings, made in the laboratory of a big city (city-and-science as a matching duality/the modern Prometheus). This hybrid being (*Frankenstein's* creature) harassed by his monstrous difference, had to flee and hide far away from people and cities, finally even reaching the arctic circle. This story starts by a fantastic output (creating a living creature) that turned out to be a huge failure, in which the creator tries to eliminate his “new Adam”, now considered as a demon (a metaphor of science and city mismatching). The creator dies in this pursuit and then, eventually, the monster commits suicide. In *Man in the Crowd*, (social) science is related to the city, identified in terms of a multitude of observers and observed and in which the monstrous being circulates: he is the multitude itself and, ultimately, the observer himself. In *Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde* (sometimes translated as *The Doctor and the Monster*) the city is characterized by the division between



the poor and working-class neighborhood (East End) and the bourgeois neighborhood (West End), where the doctor identifies with the latter, and the monster with the former. The doctor, again, is the one who creates the monster, and the monster is nothing but part of the doctor himself. Finally, in *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, the duality relationship is established within the house itself and, specifically, between the attic and the rest of the house, in an evident psychological metaphor. This takes place through the portrait of Dorian Gray made by a friend. The portrait itself began to age (and has been kept in the attic from then on). At the same time, the one portrayed retains an apparent eternal youth. What is evident in all these works is the emphasis on the duality of science, the duality of the city and the duality of life itself and how these dualities all overlap.

*d) The socialization for catastrophe.* In the 20th century, the dual problem between the cemetery city and the hygienic city and between the city of dangerous classes and the city of discipline (although not overcome) becomes more complex due to the emergence of new problems. The duality between the monitored scenario-city (planned), and the lived-city (unpredictable), and between the city of citizenship and the city of the strangers seems to emerge. Although the novels continue to produce numerous urban narratives pertinent in this context, such as *Brave New World* or *1984*, films became an invaluable new source for city analysis, since they are narratives that impact millions in a short space of time. *October* (1928) by Serguei Eisenstein and *Metropolis* (1927) by Fritz Lang are pivotal films that, in a way, close the problematic of the dual city of the 19th century and open the new duality that was more evident in the 20th century. The new duality is evidenced in Leni Riefenstahl and her Nazi propaganda films, specifically *The Triumph of the Will* (1934) and *Olympia* (1936). The relationship between these two latter filmmakers (Lang and Riefenstahl), was so important that even Hitler invited Lang to be his filmmaker after seeing *Metropolis*. Nevertheless, this invitation was refused by Lang, who ended up fleeing to the US, becoming an anti-Nazi. Consequently, Riefenstahl was the chosen one.

What, then, can we take out of films about cities in the 20th century? Undoubtedly, there are several itineraries.



Nevertheless, a specific one can be as considered relevant in order to understand cities in the 20th and 21st centuries: the fascist city controlled by media and digital technologies became part of everyday live and only hazards or/and great efforts, in a lonely fight or a fight of a very few, made it possible even to understand how we are being deceived. Let's refer 3 films: *i) Pleasantville*, 1998; *ii) Truman Show*, 1998; *iii) Matrix*, 1999.

Pleasantville (the pleasant city), Seahaven (the paradise by the sea, the city of the Truman show), and the Megacity (Megacity of matrix), represent, at the end of the 20th century, a crystallization of the dichotomy between the hypocrisy of the scenario-city (ultra-planned and super-supervised, made of subjugated puppets) and the city of citizenship (clandestine, "alive" and unpredictable in its struggle to reveal hypocrisy). It is a kind of awareness of the epilogue of the American dream of the 1950s, which has spread, in a way, to the entire West: a planned and perfect city-suburb world, in a society of full employment and mass consumption. Interestingly, in the first two films the city-setting is a function of two television "formats", in Pleasantville a soap and in Truman Show a reality show, while in The Matrix, the city is already a function of the digital world, being actually a computer program.

If the awareness of the scenario-city in opposition to the lived-city was already a clear call for alarm, the 21<sup>st</sup> century presented new post-apocalyptic foresights both in movies, series and digital games: a nuclear war; a new glacier age; an asteroid that is on a collision course with Earth; an invasion from aliens; a genetic mutation and so forth. How should we interpret this boom of catastrophic media and digital culture that invades our mobiles, our computers, our houses and our brains? Isn't it this culture precisely a collective consciousness addressing the peak we are currently facing? Are these narratives playing a role of denying or defeating-prophecies? Are we imagining dystopia and fear as a way to avoid collective catastrophe? The emergence of social movements in which the young generations play a relevant role, focusing on the planet and claiming a paradigm change, may well be seen as an action resulting from the consolidation of sustainability as an academic, political and practical challenge. As we know, near the threshold, the stochastic



elements are important for determining the new structural regime (Gallopín 2020: 4). A such, we question: which is our chance to promote and fight for influencing a happy-end in this terrifying narrative?

*Cities as “dissipative systems” and strategic implications of human behavior*

The journey for the humanistic narratives evidences cities as a continuous duality in which difference and indifference, eutopia and dystopia, desire and fear and, finally, imminent catastrophe are unavoidable presences. Another way of saying more or less the same thing, using physics, is to state that cities are “dissipative systems”.

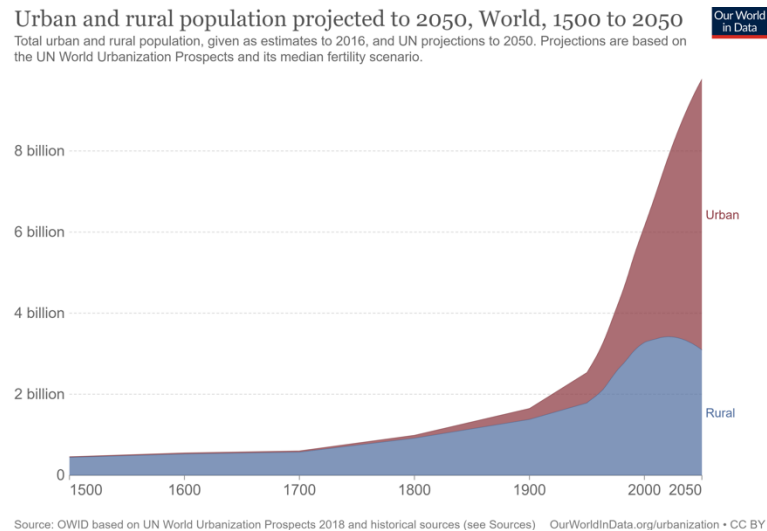
Dissipative Structures were characterized by Ilya Prigogine and several other authors used this theory or the understanding of cities as dissipative systems (Dyke 1988; Alberti 1996; Allen 1997; Gallopín 2020). Dissipative systems are

processes of self-organization in systems fulfilling some basic conditions: openness toward their environment, a global system state far from thermodynamic equilibrium, and hypercycles, or autocatalytic non-linear self-reinforcement of certain steps in their internal processes (the hypercycles are sets of reactions, where some elements catalyze the self-replication of other elements in sequence and where the latter catalyzes the first) (Gallopín 2020: 3).

All social systems fulfill these conditions and can therefore be rightfully considered as dissipative systems. Cities are, as a consequence, dissipative systems. The dissipative structures are principally stable. However,

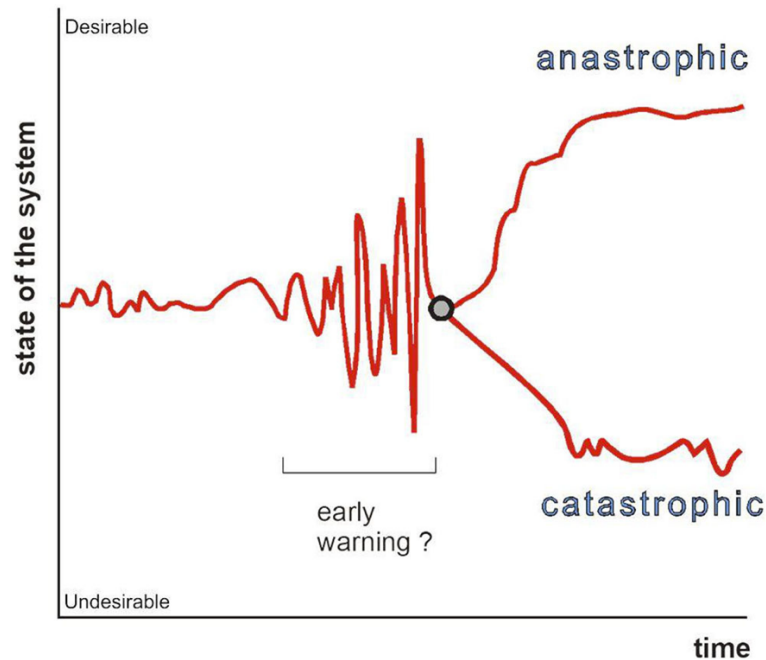
any structure of a non-equilibrium system may be driven beyond a threshold into a new regime when the fluctuations exceed a critical size. This corresponds to a qualitative change in the dynamic existence of the system, a bifurcation of its line of evolution” (Gallopín 2020: 4).

As cities became the hegemonic social system for the human kind and considering its complexity, non-equilibrium becomes

Fig. 1. *Urban and rural population projected to 2050.*

Source: Gallopin 2020.

more evident and the increasing fluctuations seems to put our urban way of life always in a threshold. As we reach 70 per cent of the human species living in the same kind of structure, cities, which are interconnected in an increased global network of networks, a fluctuation (or perturbations) in a certain locale may impact in a domino kind of way the entire system. This becomes strikingly clear with the recent history of the global impacts of our climate crisis (from climate awareness to climate crisis and emergence); perpetual war (from cold war to terror wars there is a trend towards preventive and preemptive war that turns war into a perpetual state); economic crisis (petrol crisis, the break of dollar gold-pattern in the 70's, the stagflation of the 80's, the stock-market crash of 1987 and consequent crisis of 90's, the 2008 financial crisis and the ongoing 2020 new stagflation crisis in the aftermath of pandemics and war); pandemics (and other historical examples since AIDS in 1981, SARS in 2002-2004, and the most recent case of Covid-19) and so forth. Increasing fluctuations led to bifurcation and to an unpredictable outcome.

Fig. 2. *State of the system.*

Source: Gallopin 2020.

However, we want to question, with Gallopin about “the strategic implications of the potential qualitative behavior that can be expected from the interpretation of cities as dissipative structures” (Gallopin 2020: 5). As he says, “the theory of dissipative structures and other evidences tell us that in times of turbulence and systemic reconfiguration small actions can self-amplify and transform the future” (Gallopin 2020: 9). Even if everyone proposes some small actions, we argue that only a new complete infrastructure of knowledge based on sustainable and ecumene schools and universities can promote a new ecumene generation with intellectual capital that enhances active transformational learning communities of practices for constructively transforming the future.

Tab. 1. *Basic characteristics of the city as a dissipative system.*

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- a) It is an open system, with a permanent exchange of energy, materials and information with its environment, essential for its metabolism and survival.
- b) It has a dense packing that favors a high concentration of “reactants” (interacting entities) and a high number and frequency of human-human, human-things and things-things interactions.
- c) It contains hypercycles or autocatalytic cycles, within both the physical and social realms.
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*Source:* adapted from Gallopin 2020.

## THE WAY TO GLOBALIZATION, GLOBAL MONITORING AND GLOCALISMS

Cities are the most complex human extension and, as such, they require more complex social and governance systems. Fluctuations of the model seem to have led, at least until present times, to higher organization and complexity levels. From the first agro-cities to state-cities, and to the city of the State and metropolitan regions. As cities move towards global anastrophe (through complex regional interconnectedness or even global organization) the risk of fluctuations increases, and consequently, there are always specific cities on the edge of catastrophe. Understanding the path towards a broadened conviviality (an ecumene) imply to identify the modes of conviviality as they relate with a specific city-design throughout time.

The city was an aggregation of differences for several purposes on its roots. We may even state, referring to Mumford, that the city existed before the city! A set of situations, eventually scattered in space, put together unfamiliar people suddenly perceived as one: the market and the exchange/selling of surplus; the storehouse to prepare for the collective future; the fortress to fight the “other”; the temple to ask the protection of the gods; the magic-artistic center that intensifies a mix of profane and sacred gathering; the cemetery to honor the ancestors

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(Mumford 1968). All these situations represented different modes of conviviality and the city, which was in fact an agrotown that emerged as a design platform, ultimately articulating several modes of conviviality and codes of rights, establishing specific connections between them.

Even in the Middle Age, it was not easy to find a city in all its dimensions. This has been referred by Weber (1966) in an exclusion reasoning, rejecting the unique criteria for defining the city: the dimension, the economic, the political, as well as the legal were not enough *per se* to define a city. Therefore, in order to consider it as a city, it would be necessary to find establishments of a very pronounced industrial-mercantile nature, which, at the same time, included the following characteristics: *a*) the fortress; *b*) the market; *c*) its own court and, at least partially, its own law; *d*) associational character and, together with that, at least, *e*) partial autonomy and autocephaly, therefore, administration in charge of authority in whose choice the bourgeois, as holder of these privileges, constitutes the characteristic of the city in the political sense. As such, the city included the several modes of conviviality in a complex articulation. Walls created specific rights to the ones who lived inside and specific rules for the relation between insiders and outsiders. The city was basically a state-city with specific rights, although rights were mainly attached to social strata and accompanied the person wherever.

The industrial city (and particularly the combined factory and transports revolutions) evidenced a turmoil (as referred earlier in this paper) by an exponential growth and a reversal of the dependency pattern: by now, the rural depends on the city demand. The city organized itself greatly by the distribution of the several populations through a diversity of institutions, subordinating each of them to a general discipline. This general discipline was built through a specific design (with circles, semi-circles and corridors and their combinations as the basis) and through specific modes of conviviality, with the divide between see and be seen as vigilant and discipline mechanism which evidenced also a divide between citizens and denizens. Foucault (2020) identified this new general discipline greatly as panopticons and as a merging of two disciplines of exception or block



discipline that were prevalent in the previous thousand years: the discipline of the lepers and the discipline of the pest. All the populations were scattered in different institutions and all were stigmatized and treated in a subordinated way: children in schools, workers in factories, families in working neighborhoods, delinquents in correction houses or prisons, sick people in hospitals or mental institutions, different ethnicities in colonies. Therefore, the city turned into a multiplication of fractal vigilance institutions. Urbanization was the way to the modern nation-states and citizenship was built as a blend of the right to the (western) city and national rights (Lefebvre 1996).

Mundialization of economy and the transport, telecommunication revolutions, and particularly the emergence of the digital world, created a clear transition from modernization towards globalization. Urbanization is being substituted by metropolization with metropolitan regions as the evidences of a globalization paradigm. The awareness of the mundialization of economy and of world cities dates back to the 70's of the 20th century. Meanwhile, it was exactly in 1978 that "Habitat", the UN agency for Human Settlements, was established. Right after, the Habitat I conference in 1976 built on the awareness of the "big acceleration": cities gain their first global monitor even before globalization emerged as a ubiquitous trope! Each twenty years the Habitat agency has a big Conference about the state of cities in the world (1976, United Nations Conference on Human Settlements; 1996, An Urbanizing World; 2016, Urbanization and Development – Emerging Futures). Each of these conferences led to an Agenda, the latter one known as "The New Urban Agenda". This global monitoring is also the awareness of this apparently unstoppable fragile human extension that cities represent, and of the enormous challenges that they constitute, well expressed in the titles of their reports: *Cities in a globalizing world* (2001); *The challenge of slums* (2003); *Financing urban shelter* (2005); *Enhancing urban safety and security* (2007); *Planning sustainable cities* (2009); *Cities and climate change* (2011); *Planning and design for sustainable urban mobility* (2013); *The value of sustainable urbanization* (2020). Although cities as empirical particular cases are fragile and, in many cases, doomed either by natural disasters or cultural ones,



the model itself has prevailed at least for 7.000 years. It is possible that cultural selection and even evolution may be found beyond an apparently chaotic array of catastrophic and successful cases. In fact, we as human kind have been broadening our concept of citizenship towards a more international or even global citizenship paradigm and cities have been keen elements on that route.

Metropolization or metropolitan regions are already networks of networks: cities intertwined in a discontinuous area. The world is more and more understandable as international regions which aggregate in a continuous effort of coherence, always unstable, an archipelago of these big regional urban conurbations or meta-metropolitan regions. As such, new transnational modes of conviviality play a role as double interfaces within these new regions: creating bounds amongst cities and bounds amongst the global archipelago of regions. Malls or shopping centers; thematic parks; industrial, technological and innovation centers; university campus; airports, cargo and cruise ports; sports training centers; urban/metropolitan parks; cultural heritage centers; CCI (cultural and creative industries) are some of these interfaces. We are still inventing the whole collection of transnational modes of conviviality and its intertwined international framework. As Mumford addressed the origin of the city, it may be considered that metropolitan regions pre-existed through these conviviality interfaces even before we were able to state that we are in the presence of a metropolitan region. Each of these new transnational interfaces – although still influenced by the panopticon of the urbanization paradigm – are increasingly built as heterotopias, spaces that include all the other spaces. Heterotopias are a new level of organization and complexity in comparison with panopticons. The heterotopia is a highly planned, detailed organized and vigilant equipment in which every behavior is anticipated (compensation heterotopia) but, at the same time, the city-user of this equipment should be driven by the illusion of a free random walk-around in a space in which fantasies can be projected and appropriated (illusion heterotopia). Besides and moreover, every heterotopia equipment should be like a ship, the heterotopia *par excellence* for Foucault. Each of these equipment



performs a glocal role through the interface between cities as well as between similar equipment, nationally and internationally. As such, they are ships in movement. Such equipment transformed the urban from a flat territory into a tridimensional one and the higher their transnational impact, the more they play their role as glocal distributors of flows (of people, information, technology, and so forth).

#### FUTURE PERSPECTIVES: THE ECUMENIAL OR CATASTROPHIC CITY AS THE PEAK

The ecumene goes far back in history, but has always been used with the same purpose: to designate a common sense between human beings, a mutual ground of understanding. This has stretched from Greek designations (3000 BC) through the roman empire (31 BC) and remained to be the core for expressing religious/Christianity brotherhood bounds that crossed geographical borders around the globe. The ecumene stands for a characterization for togetherness of a specific human public in a realm of shared values, perceptions and conviviality patterns. Furthermore, it implies the prevalence of divisions and difference on one side, and common sense and active partaking on the other. The ecumene, as a human driver, embraces inhabiting a shared space for creating and (re)producing a collective ideal that goes beyond cognitive and physical borders. It can be argued that there are four categories predominant (and cross-cutting) in the quest of reasoning human encounter and conviviality through the ecumene: civilization, society, culture, and politics. Considering this closer, it should be clear that the given categories are the main drivers for coping with difference and commonalities. The exploration of the ecumene partakes in time-space continuum, pulling through the past, the present and the future, with the latter one as the center of attention for approaching the ecumenial city of conviviality. This, so we argue, can be tackled through both top-down and bottom-up mechanisms, and also, in an interactive and mutually affecting way. In the next and final moment we will reflect upon the bottom-up gaze from the margins, emphasizing the possibilities of



transversal research dimensions which remain fluid, people driven and, in some cases, likewise, a response to (and interaction with) larger institutions and frameworks (top-down).

Considering the ecumene through its previously discussed large-scale dimensions (as to be found in literature), a specific – and relevant – gaze remains to be absent in recurrent research: contexts of building a mutual ground of understanding beyond borders that clearly surpasses national borders in its worldviews and rationalizations. Hence, we propose a set of platforms and spaces of shared (future) objectives that reveal the prevalence of the ecumene: transborder places for establishing mutual grounds of understanding. This allows to engage with new forms of identity, and to construct novel transnational communities where quests of socio-economic class and possibilities, center and periphery, ethnicity and religion, gender and generations, language, and others are in constant negotiation both online and in real life: intentional communities and urban squads; new transnational recognizable pop culture lifestyles like hipsters, hip-hop, vegetarian and vegans, yoga and many others; “e/net/web-diasporas” and the social gaming communities; transnational urban youth (student cosmopolitanism) and expat communities; axis-mundi cities or “the umbilicus of the world” (for instance, Kathmandu, Auroville); potential ecumenical cities/city nodal points of plural religious importance (Jerusalem, Santiago Compostela, Fatima, Cathedral of Santa Sophia and the city of Istanbul; S. Francisco Xavier); cities of specific religions as places of “gathering of differences” (Vatican, Mecca, the Sapt Puri or the seven holy cities of Hinduism cities with Varanasi as the holiest, Angkor Wat in Cambodia as a Buddhist center place); cities that are centers of new international regions in the making (Brussels in EU; Hanoi in ASEAN, and so forth); World Heritage places, Transnational thematic parks and touristic centers; cities open to refugees (sanctuary cities of the USA such as Berkley, Los Angeles, Chicago, etc.); and others. It seems like there is an entire new cultural map of the world, as well as of each city, to acknowledge where new transnational cultures are being built.

We may understand this list of scattered attempts for ecumenes in a cross-cut perspective: bottom-up gaze from the



margins and a few top-down agendas. What characterizes the bottom-up movements is the intention and purpose of change towards a better future, as a response to both the past and the present. It accentuates dissatisfaction with a larger system, or the building of collectives which create a new ground beyond the already known. This includes transversal communication that supersedes language, ethnicity, nationhood, citizenship, supposedly predetermined identity, belonging and so forth. It allows the formation of a new togetherness: may this be (anarchic oriented) groups with political agenda, the urge for “liberation from the system” and/or the aim towards environmental, humanitarian and spiritual change (as in urban squads for personally chosen dropout of mainstream society; intentional communities for spiritual/human expansion; Kathmandu as a transnational city of individual liminality and “the search for something more”; Auroville as international terrain for planetary transformation on Indian ground; religious memorials surpassing sanctimonious specific unities; or sanctuary cities creating a new transnational humanitarian ground of aid and reception).

If bottom-up ecumene initiatives are relevant, we should not underestimate several top-down agendas, both political (international regions in the making by convergence of nation-states), as well as cultural ones (for instance the collection of World Heritage as a way towards world culture). Cities, in all cases, serve as brokerage platform, that not only interconnects a great diversity of meaning systems and groups of specific purpose crossing several borders, but, more than that, allows them to transform into new units, linking the before – now – and yet to come purpose of life. Hence, we can consider that the story of cities, despite all the historic situations, represent an evolution concerning a socio-spatial design, an opening up of cities beyond national borders to transnational populations and, finally, a translation and convergence of rights that enhance “beyond borders mutual recognition”. If the Polis was a city of just a few citizens in a ruralization context, the civitas was already a national or imperial one in an urbanization realm and, finally, the metropolis or metropolitan region already represents the way towards globalization specifically with a convergence of

rights from several national states. The ecumenial city or ecumenopolis is the city that we are already building.

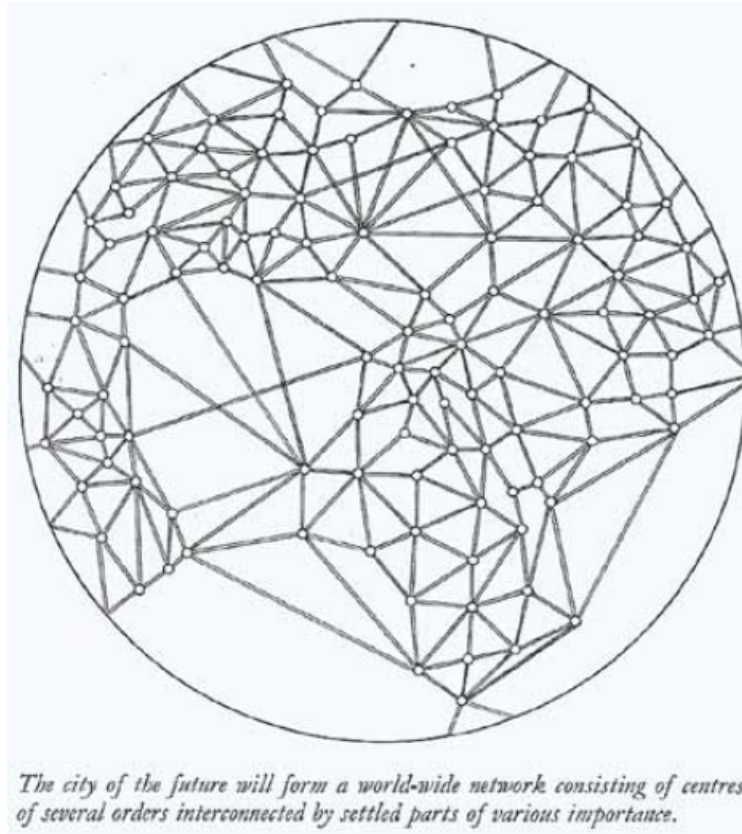
In 1968, Doxiadis<sup>5</sup> proposed the term “Ecumenopolis” in order to designate “the coming city that, together with the corresponding open land which is indispensable for man, will cover the entire earth as a continuous system forming a universal settlement” (Doxiadis 1968: 32). The project “City of the Future” (COF) was the first project of Doxiadis, which was initiated in 1960, though conceived as early as 1958. Doxiadis extensively elaborated on the theme in an article and a book (1968, 1974). In his last book he wrote about the “life-system which may embrace practically all mankind globally as early as the year 2100, and, more conceivably, no later than 2200” (Tacher 1975: 315). Ecumenopolis, for Doxiadis, is a continuous world city, a world conurbation built on the awareness of megalopolis in the 60’s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gotman 1961; Doxiadis 1968).

Such cities, growing dynamically over the next two or three generations, will finally be interconnected, in one continuous network, into one universal city which we call the ecumenic city, the city of the whole inhabited earth, or Ecumenopolis. If we speak, therefore, of the cities of the future one century from now, we can state that they will have become one city, the unique city of mankind (Doxiadis 1968: 15).

Doxiadis built his idea of an ecumenopolis not only in an expanding of the megalopolitan form and structure but, as well, in a long genealogy of a cosmopolitan world. He takes us in a journey on cosmopolis ideas that goes far as the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C. with the Cynics and the Stoics, the formers considering cosmos (and not cities) as a dwelling place, and the latter referring a world state. He refers that the idea of the universal state emerged as well in China and India by the same time (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.). The Christian West, the Roman and Byzantine Empires, the one church world in feudal times, the Islamic World; the dream of a unified Europe in 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and finally the ideas of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the need of a world order, a world state, of a “world brain”, of a “noosphere” (Doxiadis 1968: 15-16).



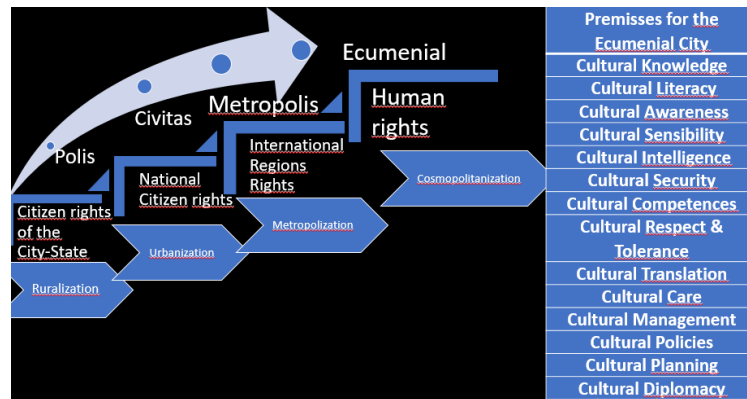


Fig. 3. *The city of the future.*

Source: Theodosis 2015: 249.

Built on our own perspectives and assuming the legacy of Doxiadis, the ecumenial city can be perceived as the city of hope, the expected city: the city we should anticipate. Ultimately, it can be stated that it will become a city of destiny: an entropy. The ecumenial city is a city of “the right to have rights”: a city of human rights in a cosmopolitan world. Finally, for further research we propose that building an ecumenial city requires activating cultural dimensions of public policies: cultural knowledges, literacy, awareness and sensibility that contribute



Fig. 4. *The ecumenial city.*

Source: elaboration of the authors.

to cultural intelligence, security and competences, enabling respect and tolerance, translation and care, which supports cultural management, planning and diplomacy.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Appadurai in *The fear of small numbers* gives us a glimpse on the dark side of globalization through the array of violence episodes in the transition from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From the fall of the Berlin Wall until the new war to terror in the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, he questions on the increase of cultural motivated violence. The nation-state confronts the two faces of globalization: capitalism expansion and the new cellular unvertebrate powers in which Al-Qaeda is an example. Globalization created a turmoil between small numbers (minorities and their emancipation aims) and global majorities. Eradicating small numbers as well as small numbers trying to influence or even lead the world reveals a clear problem of difference.

<sup>2</sup> Since “ecumenical studies” is already a label used specifically to religious studies and the comparison among differences within religion, our approach is to use “ecumene studies” to follow the idea in a broader sense, considering cultural difference at large and not only religion as a specific field.

<sup>3</sup> We have to refer here the relation that exists between our statement and the aims of Doxiadis when he created Ekistics as a science to plan a city and to save the world (see Theodosis 2015: 250-255).

<sup>4</sup> Ethology refers that when distance between difference becomes diminished, there is a critical point in which corporal fight turns unavoidable, unless there are genetic mechanisms of avoidance: exoskeletons, turning the body into kind of a ball, or,

for instance, showing the backside first. Unfortunately (or not) human kind does not inherit such mechanisms which push them to be extinct.

<sup>5</sup> Right after finishing this article, we were confronted with the existence of the writings of Doxiadis on Ecumenopolis. It was an ambivalent surprise: our original proposal was somewhat blurred but at the same time gained the strength of a *zeitgeist* in movement. Therefore, we do believe with Doxiadis that the ecumenial city or ecumenopolis, as he coined it, is an entopia: an inevitable utopia.

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