

# **BANDUNG-BELGRADE-HAVANA CONFERENCE**

*WHAT DREAMS, WHAT CHALLENGES, WHAT PROJECTS FOR A GLOBAL FUTURE?*

*Jakarta-Bandung-Surabaya-Bali, November 7-13, 2022*

## ***SESSION 4: ECOLOGY-HEALTH-URBAN / RURAL ISSUES-SUSTAINABILITY***

### **REFLECTIONS AND DANGERS ON THE FUTURE OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT**

As stated in the previous conferences human being needs to live in harmony with the natural environment, the heritage and to socialize. For centuries all forms of urban settlement and aggregation have developed trying to maintain a balance between these different needs. The relationship with the surrounding environment, considered the basic element of productive, agricultural and other resources, and the safeguard of the territory over time, has regulated the city-countryside interrelations.

The need to live in a context of physical and / intangible patrimony components, specific to each site, is a need to recognize oneself in a "*genius loci*" of belonging, and the necessity to develop adequate social relations and exchanges is another factor that has contributed over the centuries to the localization and growth of human settlements, gradually increasing from villages to towns and cities.

This process in recent centuries has been enhanced by the various industrial revolutions with the new needs for proximity, concentration and mobility but developed with a gradual rhythm and still careful to maintain these balances as much as possible. The profound changes of recent decades resulting from economic globalization, and above by the progressive advent of new technologies in all fields, question the very principles that have guided urban development for centuries.

It had an exponential development due to the needs of proximity home-work, concentration of services and so on, which has led to an excessive of land use even in inadequate areas, to the growth of precarious settlements, extended commuting flows, increased pollution. All negative impacts that have progressively reduced the advantages of urban living, so far considered an inevitable paradigm, which is questioned by the widespread use of new technologies, by the implementation of green and circular economy and by the need to mitigate climate change, of which the large urban agglomerations are responsible as heat islands and not only.

The latest emergencies, from pandemics to increasingly recurring environmental disasters, are an alarm signal to review and modify the entire scheme of human settlement and recover a balanced relationship with the territory. It is in fact evident that the abandonment of vast agricultural areas and their depopulation towards large cities, has progressively reduced the human monitoring on woods, rivers, mountain slopes, thus favoring catastrophic natural events, increasingly recurring in every part of the globe.

This abandonment also means a serious damage to human heritage, not only considering the tangible patrimony of towns and villages rich in monuments and vernacular buildings, but also the intangible one, even more important for habits, uses and traditions that precisely represent the specific *genius loci* and determine the sense of belonging of each person to his birth site and community.

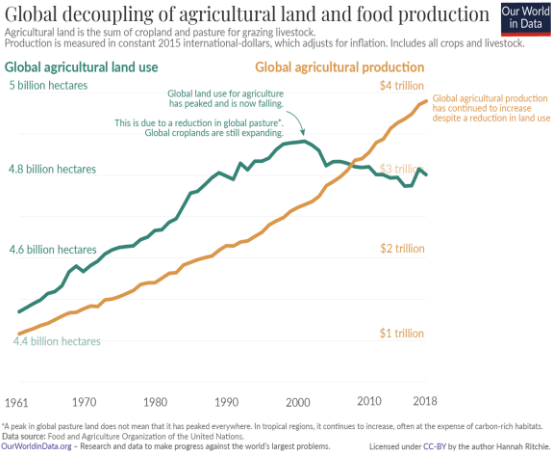
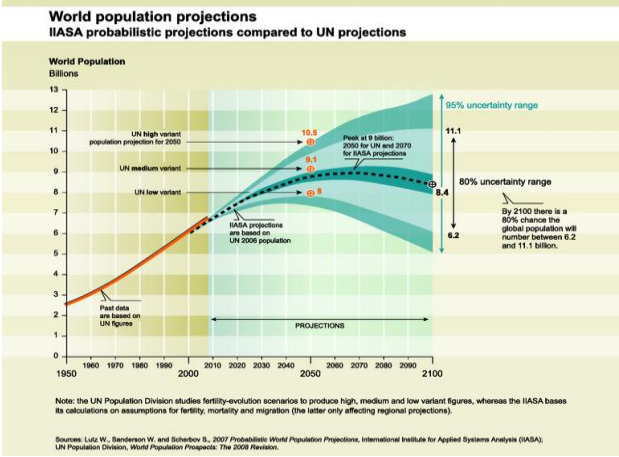
In recent years, proposals such as smart cities, compact cities, etc. have been put forward in the name of sustainability. In which elements as: reduced mobility, less land occupation, more compact energy networks and so on, are emphasized as highly positive elements, leaving out the negative impacts that are increasingly present such as: pollution, use of water and energy non-renewable resources, daily commuting traffic flows, etc ..

But the most evident and relevant negative aspect, in my opinion, is the represented by the reduction of social well-being and belonging to a community, which decreases in proportion to the size of the urban agglomeration; the proposals to revitalize the neighborhoods, 15 minutes cities and so on, are trying to favor social exchanges in smaller urban areas and to mitigate the isolation of metropolitan residents.

However, the sense of belonging is the result of generations and consolidated, sometimes unconscious, links with one's own site; the nostalgia of the elderly to return to their native country is common in almost all countries, and based on physical and intangible elements that represent the specific heritage of each place and community, which in modern megacities it is difficult to reconstruct. The historic cities, which have developed over the centuries, still are capable to maintain these values, giving priority to those of the single district (neighborhood, quarter, etc) and then those of the entire city, in which the individuals identify themselves, while in cities developed artificially it is difficult to create these conditions.

Since the world population, according to the majority of forecasts, is destined to stabilize after 2050 by this century, it is perhaps possible begin to mitigate the migratory flows towards the big metropolises, that have characterized the last decades and motivated by the priority and inevitable needs of proximity to residence, work and services. New technologies and changes in the economic structure at all levels, allow or even oblige to seek new more balanced models of urban settlement in the territory .

In addition the forecasts concerning the agricultural use of soils for food production are of a reduction of the surfaces in recent years with greater profitability, adding another factor that allows to plan not only the use of resources but overall land uses. It is foreseeable that this process, also in this field due to the use of innovative technologies, will continue in the future. Therefore together with a stabilized world population, it will be possible to plan the territory with less pressure and a more correct destination of the various uses in a integrated vision.



Bringing people's well-being back to the center of sustainable development, compared to the consumerist values that have undoubtedly prevailed in recent decades, in order to achieve the 17 SDG's of the 2030 Agenda, now universally accepted, is now indispensable.

Among these objectives some, especially objective N°. 11: “*Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*” provide indications and directives for an integrated approach and a renewed vision of urbanization processes. Metropolitan areas are in fact among the main causes of excessive land use, the progressive reduction of natural resources, the increase in polluting factors responsible for the increase in global temperature.

In my opinion, there is the opportunity to start a new reflection on the many negative aspects of urbanization processes, determined by purely economic needs and conditioned by speculative instances, mostly without any respect for the environment and society. The sudden spread, due to the still ongoing pandemic emergency, of new customs such as: home-working, distance education, telemedicine, online shopping, etc., has accelerated exponentially processes that were expected to come true in an arc time of 15/20 years. These changes profoundly affect the entire pattern of daily life for each of us and are bound to persist over time.

Health reasons, the need to have larger housing, more green spaces, accessible meeting places and so on, are pushing, all over the world, increasing numbers of ‘*city dwellers*’ to move away from large urban centers. The possibility of residing anywhere, thanks to technological advances, represents a unique occasion for a revival of towns, villages and rural centers as poles of social aggregation with the offer of a better quality of life.

The sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda confirmed the need to adopt overall indicators of well-being, not only economic, but above all the need to have a new vision with the well-being of the person as the center of attention. In particular, as regards urban issues, it is necessary to substantially review the economic paradigms, actually with production and consumption at the center, which do not adequately take into account social and environmental values and their reciprocal interrelations.

The objective is certainly the one desired by many agencies and governments is the well-being and social cohesion of citizens, reducing the territorial gap between urban and rural areas, and at the same time greater safeguarding of both tangible and intangible heritage and the environment which is a reasonably achievable result. Well-being of a community is also reflected in its way of inhabiting the territory and taking care of its cultural heritage, among which the protection of the landscape and of the cultural, historical and artistic heritage are fundamental elements and represent, in addition to the economic ones, indicators of the quality of civil life, specific for each social and environmental context.

The European Union has been moving in this direction for some years and more recent strategies, guidelines and programs are aimed at achieving common well-being by promoting an integrated and environmentally friendly development. The goal is to develop a green economy capable of developing the resilience of a system that faces change, manages and follows-up its development. The scope of this new strategy is not only reflected in environmental policies but, represents the EU contribution to the achievement of the objectives set by the Paris agreements and Agenda 2030 inclusive of all 17 SDGs.

Furthermore, the development of the circular economy will bring many activities back to the local or regional level as all the reuse and repair activities that will have the maximum profitability if developed locally and organized in small enterprises distributed throughout the territory. This represents a further important element for a paradigm shift in the urban settlement model, facilitating the revitalization of smaller centers through the expected creation of new companies and jobs, necessary to meet the demands of local communities.

Unfortunately, however up to now are proposed and developed projects of reckless and invasive urban agglomerations, that are alienating from the point of human and social well-being.

A significant example is the NEOM initiative (which is part of the Saudi VISION 2030 program so with assured financial resources) being presented this August in an exhibition in Saudi Arabia: among the various proposals there is the LINE, a linear city of 170 km, wide 200 mt. for over 9 million inhabitants, which cuts through mountains and deserts with the total void around it! Reminds the canals of Mars, the dead planet, and it is terrible to see what is being planned in the name of sustainability and ecology ..!

The second project of the initiative is TROJENA, a futuristic and very exclusive winter resort in the mountains of Saudi Arabia, using water for creating lakes and artificial snow, when globally the natural glaciers are disappearing and hidric resources are decreasing !!

The third project of the initiative is OXAGON, the largest floating structure in the world, to install a logistic pole and port of 48 km<sup>2</sup> with 90,000 inhabitants, promoted under the slogan of a: "*New Paradigm where people, industries and technology come together in harmony with nature.* " in the perspective of the green economy and sustainability, meanwhile entire coastal cities are sinking !!

This is just one example of many similar mega urban projects, which propose: "*With the world's population continuing to increase and climate change drastically affecting our environment, many metropolises are struggling to grow, develop and even support citizens within current and traditional urban designs* "

Public authorities, private promoters and companies are carrying out various projects, some already in the development phase, designed among the most famous star architects who believe they can modify the very idea of cities to make them more liveable and eco-compatible!! Among them just to name a few:

- **BiodiverCity, Malaysia.** A city where people and nature co-exist, each of BiodiverCity's lily pad-shaped islands will be home to between 15,000 and 18,000 residents. city will be built using natural materials such as timber, bamboo and concrete created from recycled materials. **Chengdu Future City, China** The six distinct zones of the city will be connected though a smart mobility network using automated vehicles. The zones will also be pedestrian-friendly and within a 10-minute walk of each other. **Net City, China** a 22-million-square-foot urban development named Net City will be built on reclaimed land and will be designed to accommodate a population of 80,000 people. is designed to reduce traffic by including roads for buses, bikes and automated vehicles . **Akon City, Senegal** a planned 2,000-acre futuristic city that will be located along the Atlantic coast, in south of Dakar, Senegal the smart city will be eco-friendly and powered by renewable energy. **Telosa, the US** With a planned population of five million people by 2050, Telosa will be a "15-minute city" where all amenities from schools, workplaces and goods and services will be within that range from residents' homes. Telosa will be the most sustainable city in the world with no vehicles powered by fossil fuels. ( It also includes a reformed version of capitalism where wealth is created in a fair way, keeping residents' quality of life as a priority???) . **Woven City, Japan** one of the world's first smart cities: a fully autonomous community designed to test new technologies such as automated driving, robotics and artificial intelligence. The city will be fully sustainable, powered by hydrogen fuel cells where pedestrian. **Floating City, Maldives** first floating cities in the world is being built in the Maldives in response to rising sea levels. With climate change threatening to change many cities around the world, 80 per cent of the Maldives is expected to be uninhabitable by 2050. Maldives Floating City is currently being designed to home 20,000 people as soon as 2024.

Various are promoted and already implemented by the public authorities themselves, such as:

• ***New Administrative Capital, Egypt***

*Capital City is part of a larger initiative for Egypt's 2030 Vision. The yet-to-be-named new capital city, located 45 kilometers east of Cairo, will be home to up to seven million people. The project covers 700 square kilometers and include 21 residential districts and 25 dedicated districts, 1,250 mosques and churches, solar energy farms and one of the world's largest urban parks.*

• ***Amaravati, India***

*The new administrative capital of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh in south-eastern India. Greenery and water will make up at least 60 per cent of the city with the aim of making Amaravati one of the most sustainable cities in the world, complete with the latest technologies. numerous pedestrian-friendly routes*

*And in Indonesia the planned new capital Nusantara, to be built in East Kalimantan, on the island of Borneo, to lighten the current Jakarta, but strongly opposed by environmentalists for the possible negative impacts on one of the world's rainforests.*

• ***Nusantara, Indonesia***

*Nusantara, the new Indonesian capital, is planned to be a sustainable city where high-rise structures will utilize 100 per cent eco-friendly construction and use entirely renewable energy. The cost of moving the capital is estimated to cost \$ 35 billion and is seen as a necessary step for Indonesia's future. Building Nusantara will help with the economic growth of Indonesia and ease pressures on Jakarta, which suffers from continuous traffic jams and issues with pollution owing to a population of more than 10 million people.*

All of them are interventions that involve, among other things, enormous financial resources, not only private, but also from by the public authorities of developing countries, that instead could be engaged in concrete recovery projects of marginalized sectors of existing urban agglomerations, that can be activated in shorter time without the use of new land and unpredictable environmental impacts.

Therefore, even just advertising projects of this type, contrary to all the indications of the 2030 Agenda and its ODS development objectives, and to the most recent strategies at a global level, seems highly dangerous as promoting possible future models of territorial, urban and tourism, developments, especially for emerging economies where no alternatives to growing megacities are still not defined.

If we agree that the vision of such projects is incompatible and exactly the opposite of what has been debated and discussed for some years, for a sustainable, widespread and human-scale territorial development, oriented towards collective well-being and local communities, I think it would be appropriate support statements from the scientific world and civil society that oppose these aberrant visions of future human settlements.

Therefore it would be appropriate to insert something in the final conclusions of the Bandung-Belgrade-Havana conference, in line with what we have been discussed in recent years on urban issues in the various Rise of Asia Conferences, and referred to the *slogan What Dreams, What Challenges, What Projects For A Global Future ?*, as a contribution from the Ecology-Health-Urban / Rural Issues-Sustainability Session.

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