

# THE RISE OF ASIA 2019

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## **ABSTRACT: RISING DANGERS OF UNRULED URBANIZATION**

### ***INTRODUCTION***

The three words entitling the panel, no matter the order, are closely connected and must be considered as parts of a single issue in any sustainable development process. In the past human settlements raised generally in harmony with the territory and environment.

But since end of XX century urbanization has been growing without any real opposition and now has become as unavoidable the dogma that human being will be soon practically urbanized, as accepted also by all international agencies as UN\_HABITAT forecasts were one decade ago of 70% in 2050, now already at 85%, and next!!! Why accept this?

Both planet and human being have been living till last century with acceptable balance and distribution on territories, compatible with their natural resources and characteristics, progressively modified by the industrial revolutions, and nowadays accelerated by new technologies and global economic connections.

Accepting that urbanization process is now unstoppable, weak or late previous opposition failed, at least actions to mitigate the trend can be evaluated and implemented as soon as possible to reduce negative effects on pollution, environment, land-use and progressive natural resources shortages; also the U.N. SDG provide up to date partial and doubtful recommendation.

The experience of metropolis and megalopolis all around the globe, expected to grow in number and size in the short future, especially in emerging Asian and African countries, is mainly negative and the final long-term impact unpredictable, but already rising atmospheric pollution and water shortage are visible, with no defined intervention strategies. Wild use of territory without any respect of the existing peculiarities and sustainability is determining permanent damages for the environment, and not only.

But negative returns rise on urban inhabitants, lost in stressing daily life rhythms for daily commuting mobility, poor services, lack of identity, socializing opportunities and adequate housing, services and public spaces. Entirely new cities based on global and theoretical models, failed on numbers, as hundred thousand became millions of residents, and planned

downtowns and neighborhoods are surrounded by slums and overcrowded precarious permanent settlements.

Is urgent therefore a deep reflection on urbanization processes to reduce them and retain the rural/urban balance anyway and wherever possible, saving traditional characteristics, traditions, tangible and intangible patrimony, all necessary elements to assure integration and social cohesion for a permanent sustainable development..

Modern technologies can surely provide effective tools in achieving territorial balance through mobility infrastructures, communication networks, renewable energies, modern agriculture and environment protection to enhance disseminated and interconnected settlements with adequate size and context for inhabitants life, reducing growing pressure to massive metropolis.

The incoming fourth industrial revolution will provide new instruments facilitating to work anywhere, to access to global knowledge and information, to access any educational and medical service, therefore reducing the need of time-loosing mobility, that represents one of the main problems of most metropolis.

A wide and efficient net of public transport and logistics systems ( in deliveries we assist to use of drones to any remote area) spread over the territories will allow to keep residents in settlements with a more human size, to be able to resume the original spirit of community joining, socializing and belonging.

### ***PREMISES***

to understand the interconnection between urban settlements, territory and natural resources in the last years has risen the relevance of the unique peculiarities of each site, that is defined as:  
*"The spirit of place can be defined as the ensemble of material and immaterial, physical and spiritual elements, which give to the area a specific identity, feeling and emotion. The spirit creates space and at the same time, the space invests and structures this spirit..."*

*(ICOMOS -Québec Declaration On The Preservation Of The Spirit Of Place- October 4th 2008)*

Cities and urban areas are living evidence of a past which formed them and part of the everyday environment of human beings. Their protection and integration into contemporary society should be a basic factor in town-planning, land development and environment protection.

Any human settlement, including urban areas at every scale, from hamlet to larger cities is formed by tangible and intangible elements. The tangible elements include, in addition to the physical urban structure, architectural elements and typologies, landscape inside and outside the town, monuments, sky-lines, townscapes and landmark sites. The intangible elements include traditional activities, historical functions, cultural practices, traditions, memories,

music, food, etc. all cultural references which represent the basis of their value during the ages.

But this spirit, the "*genius loci*" as defined in ancient times, is progressively losing its original relevance in the fast growing process of urbanization and gentrification all around the world, and the rising number of huge metropolis and megalopolis in the last decades, built following standardized international models and patterns are weakening the ancient peculiarities that cities had till about one century ago, with the advance of the diverse industrial revolutions.

### ***URBAN PLANNING GUIDELINES***

Why has the forecast that 70% of world population will live in urban areas for year 2050 in urban areas, already envisaged will live mostly in macro-cities or metropolitan areas? The Athens Charter, the manifesto of Modern Urbanism that promoted zoning according to land uses in the last decades favoured the growth of mega cities seems long way behind and the answer to new realities must and can be different. Isn't better to support the attractiveness of minor centers, that have surely more values and resilience, with adequate urban enhancement and services improvements, having obviously an efficient transport and mobility network between them.?

Medium size cities and smaller towns, that considers completely new interventions and more limited improvement actions, can be classified into different types that are characterised by common challenges and by some specific features which are different according to their size, cultural context and economic functions, the most significant are:

- have not yet expanded too far beyond its historic core and have sometimes kept within its original boundaries;
- historic core still marks the centre of social life and business and contains a large percentage of residential units;
- surrounding territory is still largely unspoiled and is an integral part of the image and economy of the city;
- have balanced and diversified resident population structure, with strong social cohesion;

Such still human-scale cities and towns are nowadays subject to specific dangers, mainly:

- they may suffer from a progressive lack of economic activity leading to the emigration of their original population toward larger centres and the consequent abandon/decay.
- also too fast and/or great development of economic activity may cause disruption of the old urban structure and upset the harmony of the environment.

- Measures or large-scale projects and/or infrastructures necessary to modern activities and uses, but not in scale to adapt the town/village may produce similar negative impacts.
- Tourism, that represents a tool for economic revitalisation, can have a negative impact on the tangible and intangible structure of the town and local population structure, if is not adapted to the urban/environmental/social scale of the site.

Therefore is necessary to define some general guidelines and best practices and at the same time develop the analysis of every local context to apply the most adequate methodology.

Is urgent in those emerging economies where the urbanization process is still under control, to make aware local and national authorities of the need to make any efforts in maintaining the positive qualities of their existing settlements and rural environment, to enhance and implement planning structures and programs for their protection and facilitate the sustainable and permanent socio-economic development.

- Urban patrimony rehabilitation and residential re-use proofs necessary to preserve the diversification of social classes in city centers and traditional neighborhoods. The upgrading of public spaces, the proximity of services and work-places is also fundamental to retain inhabitants and functions traditionally settled.
- Transport and mobility represents the freedom of the citizens to live and use the different poles of the city and the accessibility ensures the integration and exchange with the surrounding productive or rural areas.
- Logistics are a new helpful tool that facilitate commercial and compatible productive activities remain in the urban context and participate to a integrated development.
- The ITC technologies are a useful tool to help development of new activities and inmateral services within the urban centers, continuing the attraction role and function as covered till now.
- This presence of private productive activities and a wide range of public services is one of the main factors of qualification of the city centers or neighborhoods.
- The mixture of activities and residential social classes is necessary to avoid progressive downgrading and abandon processes of entire urban areas, and the public policies must be oriented to this aim, in cooperation with the private sector.
- Upgrading of public spaces, the proximity of services and work-places is also fundamental to retain inhabitants and functions traditionally settled.

Renewal - renovation instead of demolition of existing residential patrimony is representing surely a direct cost, but the general advantage is clear in terms of social cohesion. Urban

patrimony rehabilitation and residential re-use proofs necessary to keep the diversification of social classes in city centers and traditional neighborhoods.

The feeling of belonging / participation to a specific city or neighborhood is surely one of the aims to be achieved with all type of interventions, as strenght factor to improve social cohesion and identity .

Small cities or "quartier" lifestyle facilitate daily contacts and reduce emargination risks for some categories as elders, the mixture with migrants reduces risks of ethnic areas, and education facilities are necessary to the social insertion of the young.

Private traffic use should be reduced not only for pollution or economic factors, but also as against the public transport systems that are also a social mean.

Lack of adequate and qualified public spaces or meeting points also represent a serious handicap to socialize ( the old " forum or piazza" model is still valid).

From the wider concept of heritage, a vision of an homogeneous urban area is the result of the close relationship between environment, patrimony and culture, in which the attention and follow-up of the necessary forward-looking modifications will define the evolution of the entire area. Such a comprehensive approach adds value also to surrounding territory, entirely considered as complementary, to be protected and enhanced, overcoming the old traditional division, that considered some portions of urban settlements exclusively to protect, for whose there was the risk of becoming "museums", and others to be freely used as not being of particular values.

This new vision also modifies the way to deal with the urban and territorial planning because it highlights the inadequacy of the existing urban plans that mainly identify areas to be constrained, and others to be transformed through the provision of mainly quantitative parameters, as the fundamental tool of the zoning.

### ***ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION***

All the territory needs different levels of protection and enhancement, articulating the degree of transformation through quantitative parameters and criteria, but above all quality parameters, able to define and the objectives of admissible transformations.

Is necessary to study deeply each urban territory case by case to understand what are the environmental elements as: vegetation, wildlife, water regime, geo-morphology, historical, archaeological, artistic, architectural, industrial, agricultural, commercial and social resources, that constitute the main assets of that territory. Only after understanding what is the relevance and origin of these assets must be found social consensus on which to base a perspective of development and enhancement.

In the processes of environmental enhancement can be implemented every investment that does not dissipate non-reproducible resources, but who are able to increase the value of the urban pattern and heritage, making them accessible to future generations, according to the now shared definition of sustainable development

The surrounding urban territory has a fundamental role in supporting the patrimony of traditional cities being closely linked to the safeguard of environment and communities that reside and live it every daily, in alternative to the commercial globalization that characterizes contemporary metropolitan areas.

In countries with old industrialized level (Europe and USA) a change of the urbanization development model is an urgent need, also to respond to financial crisis of such globalized patterns. Meanwhile in emerging countries, that are increasing their life standard in recent years after the transition to market economy and progressive rising of incomes, this need seems less urgent, also if the perplexities are rising globally.

In fact, new metropolis of the emerging countries are quickly becoming allegory of the contemporary western urban agglomerations, with the same problems and inadequacies, often due to a lower starting position and too fast increase of residents and users.

This model of development based on massive dissemination of standardized products and lifestyles, that are similar all over the world, proved unable to assist and develop the traditional capacity and quality of local contexts, and risks to drive also these emerging countries towards a model of life unable to ensure sustainable and permanent socio-economic growth of each city and territory and contemporarily protect the environment.

Local self-sustainable development is based on a virtuous synergy between the promoters of the transformation (residents and users of the area) and putting in value all the territorial endogenous resources, and manage them through the identification and implementation of shared rules regarding use of this heritage land to produce permanent wealth and repliability.

For these and other global reasons is a priority need to focus on the enhancement of the characteristic elements and of the local territorial assets ( cultural, environmental, historical, etc..), to promote a strategy of long-term growth that include agriculture, craftsmanship, advanced technology and every activity linked to local culture and tradition. From this concept we will focus attention on the possible role of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, problems and opportunities for the development of integrated plans of territorial networks of minor historic centres and towns.

### ***LOCAL ARCHITECTURE AS VALUE***

A great importance in the identification process of inhabitants is represented by traditional and vernacular architecture. Towns and cities are composed mostly by houses and family

settlements, whose typologies in many world regions are unchanged in centuries, based on the tangible and cultural characteristics of the inhabitants in each place. The local architecture also has been always taking note and learning of the natural and environment specificities as: winds, temperature, water availability, sunshine and other elements that have contributed to create models and typologies in harmony with both residents culture and surrounding environment. The same happened with the different used materials, that were those more easily available in the settlements areas; wood, stone, bricks, mud and many others apt to built houses and also public buildings and landmarks, capable to face the climatic situation of each site. Globally there are thousands of diverse examples where to learn, adapting them to modern life standards and available technologies, in some countries this process is ongoing during the last decades and implemented successfully....

Chimneys can combine with solar heating, wind cooling systems with air condition, fires and candles with renewable energy, tanks and rain cisterns with pumps or self producing water systems, and so on. In this sector are being developed positive projects in several countries around the world, but for the moment no global actions to direct reuse and enhancement of traditional building technologies , only in Europe is rising the consensus in this direction. Also under the economic point of view this path is rentable, if applied in large scale and means minor costs the involvement of elevated men-working forces for long term and locally, helping the general economy. From the reuse and application of the traditional architecture, environment will have positive returns with a less use of ground, minor service infrastructures and possibly implement the permanence of inhabitants in traditional settlements, that is surely a valuable presidium for the entire for the entire environment and a tool in keeping social cohesion.

### ***GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS & REMARKS***

One of the conditions considered as element for the success of integrated planning, the active participation of citizens and an easy dialogue between main actors, is strongly reduced as increases the number of population to be involved and the size of the intervention area. Also diminishes strongly social cohesion and sense of community belonging of inhabitants, whose lacks facilitates the downgrading of the intangible heritage, values that represents the necessary *“interaction between tangible orders and intangible elements of the city”* and *“city can experience a boost for its identity and an enhancement of residents' living standards, when it maintains a mutually beneficial relationship, ..values without whose rises the risk that an heritage city progressively becomes just an old city” ....*

The consequent question is: are the identified measures and interventions valid for heritage

cities of small-medium size effective also in greater urban areas or remain just clusters in the center of metropolitan areas, where they lost any intangible heritage value, as lost the original inhabitants and activities?

MANY of the previous considerations are since 2011 adopted in the UNESCO-ICOMOS "*Valletta Principles*" identified by CIVVIH - International Committee on Historic Towns and Villages, whose definition by itself supposes a scale limit in the settlements considered, is fitting to many European realities and is matching perfectly in my home country Italy, where human settlements since centuries has been based on an extended net, spread all over the territory of small medium size communities, mostly at short distance from each other, with homogeneous and traditionally settled populations, where human relations are still very strong, community life intense and strong social cohesion and identity feeling.

Digital society and ITC are progressively reducing the need of daily commuting home-work and experiments of home-working are increasingly experimented by huge companies, so why this scenario (who could imagine the actual change in our life from the digital tools only 30 years ago?) is not accompanied by the revaluation of the heritage, tangible and intangible, that small cities still have and can assure a better quality of life, social cohesion and permanent sustainable urban development. The net model of smaller cities can't be replied elsewhere, especially in large and scarcely populated countries, but in territories with long time settled inhabitants, that have existing historical urban aggregation poles this strategy can be successful also in a short time..

A great danger for all heritage cities is nowadays represented by so called "cultural" tourism that if not properly regulated and managed can suffocate their values, make escape the original residents, and later in long term determine serious damages to local traditional productive activities. Cultural tourism seemingly offers historical cities and towns a new opportunity, being linked to local traditions and peculiarities, favors the process of outsourcing, and consequently the balance of urban functions is strongly altered by the emergence of seasonal masses of people using the city in a way till now unknown. So management strategies, special conservation plans, building measures and rehabilitation must be oriented to recover to local heritage, tangible and intangible, the role and relevant place in the living space of the historic cities, and massive tourism carefully develop and ruled, to avoid the progressive lack of local identity.

Considering any urban settlement as complex and unique element, created by following layers of inhabitants and cultures, in continuous modification and evolution, one of the main and urgent challenges to face is the preservation of « *the spirit of the place* », what latins called « *genius loci* » that represents the core and fundament of each site.



Cities permanently inhabited for several thousands of years can be « feeled » immediately in their essence, exactly as false urban copies or reproductions : no architect, artist or planner can recreate the multi facetic , tangible or intangible patrimony or the peculiarity of a single urban reality.

Admirable tentatives have been carried out to rebuilt or reproduce heritage marks but more successfully for single bulidings, as no other mean was possible to continue transmitting the original site spirit, the results never reached though the original emotion : but when experiments are carried on larger scales, involving urban structures or considerable parts of them, where complexity is higher, and so the relevance of social and human component, the exercise becomes difficult and never comparable with the previous situation.

Rather than set apart spirit from place, the intangible from the tangible, and consider them as opposed to each other, there are many ways in which they interact and mutually strenghten one another. The spirit of place is constructed by various social actors, its architects and managers as well as its users, which all contribute actively and concurrently.

Digital electronic data-base and web technology can be used efficiently and effectively at loss costs to develop multimedia inventories that integrate tangible and intangible elements of heritage, with the participation of local communities, we strongly recommend the widespread use of these technologies in order to better preserve places and their spirit.

As exactly stated in the ICOMOS-Charter For The Safeguard Of Historic Towns And Urban Areas- October 1987: "*the elements necessary to preserve the originality and integrity of the historic, as authenticity and integrity of historic towns consist of the historic character and the coherence among all those tangible and intangible elements that express its character, especially:*

- *Urban patterns as defined by lots, streets, green spaces and relationships between buildings and open spaces;*
- *The formal appearance, interior and exterior, of buildings as defined by scale, size, style, construction, materials, colour and decoration;*
- *The relationship between the town or urban area and its surrounding setting, both natural and man-made;*
- *The various functions that the town or urban area has acquired over time and its adaptability to new functions without betray its history and without losing its inhabitants*
- *cultural tradition, spirit of places and whatever contribute to the identity of a place.*

*Any threat to these qualities would compromise the authenticity of the historic town or urban area.”*

These principles have been confirmed in following years by other institutions as UNESCO and UN Habitat's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has included heritage in its stated Sustainable Development Goal 11.4.

Finally then is necessary a completely different approach in the future considering urban-planning, local architecture and environment as a "unicum" and to be sustainable developed by integrated and multi disciplinary tools and projects that respect every site assets and traditions. And at the time reevaluate the role of smaller urban settlements as human landmarks on the territory capable to mitigate the actual rise of out of scale new metropolis and megalopolis, especially in emerging countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, where hopefully is still possible.

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