

## Reviews

Livio Sacchi

### **Il futuro delle città**

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Reviewing Livio Sacchi's volume on the future of cities is certainly not an easy task, given the complexity and profundity of the content, which unfolds—with a very pleasant and flowing prose—for more than 500 pages without illustrations of any kind; an intriguing book, therefore, starting from the particular structuring and the happy choice of the *La Nave di Teseo* publishing house, known not for a technical-specialist characterization, but for its dealing with international fiction, non-fiction and poetry, while also maintaining a constant attention to the classics.

The volume is divided into two parts, the first of which is an excursus on theoretical themes—from the very idea of the city, to the professional condition—that investigate presuppositions, conditions, conditioning influences, potentialities and criticalities of urban nuclei, while the second proposes, in a narrative and at the same time analytical manner, examples of cities/megalopolises throughout the world.

Thirteen chapters make up the first part, five the second; a true *opera omnia*, in which themes linked to the very nature of being a city coexist dialectically alongside readings on places throughout the world, organized by continents. It is difficult, therefore, to bring all this together in outlining the main aspects of the work; the best way seems to be that of indicating the key words that emerge during the course of reading the essay and that can become a guide

for personal interpretation.

The first key word that presents itself to the reader is RESPONSE, the answer that the city gives to the desire for change, for individual growth and for overcoming the limits imposed by a sub-urban origin; the fortune of urbanism should be considered in this sense, in its responding to the needs of individuals driven to seek independence and disconnection from their own origins to enact a freedom of thought and of action that can also correspond to the potential affirmation of one's own being. And this is what is still happening today, with ever increasing passages of scale, which see the transformation of cities into metropolises and megalopolises, in search of ever-increasing opportunities, up to the vision of a globalization of interests and possibilities.

Closely connected to the previous word is TERRITORY, which implies reflections on the birth and the expansion of urban nuclei, on their link with the disposition of the portion of the world on which they rise, on the *genius loci* and the consequent possible conditioning, on the response of the man-builder in terms of respect for such a conditioning or the will to deny and/or overcome it. Territory also implies the concept of landscape, but above all, it implies the concept of anthropization: the imprint that man gives and that is expressed through construction, at all levels. In particular, this means tackling at least two fundamental questions: on the one hand, the

relationship with the past and with the traces—more or less intense and invasive—which must be confronted and, on the other hand, the architectural language, understood as the visualization of the identity of a place... only these two frames of reference open the way to the majority of critical reflections for a designer has to face before the realization, often conditioned or at least guided by the respect of complicated and at times strict legal constraints.

Again linked to the territory, seen as the frame within which the urban nuclei are located at different dimensional scales—but this would call for a separate discussion—is the reflection on SUSTAINABILITY, in the contemporary world a true emergency, unfortunately not infrequently interpreted as a slogan; in a purposeful way, however, we refer here to the contribution that digitalization is giving even today in terms of effective globalization and continuity of interpersonal relationships—related to work or not—as a support to the maintaining of a difficult and complex equilibrium.

Instead, the social DISEQUILIBRIUM of cities, but above all, of metropolises and mega-cities, is easily perceivable in the dualism, often in contraposition, between the center and the suburbs, which can even lead to possible segregations: “wealthy” neighborhoods closed and inaccessible in a sort of voluntary segregation, but also “poor” neighborhoods,

equally segregated and separated, often due to their physical distance from each other. In addition, there is a burning contemporary issue, that of migration and of the flows that could potentially constitute an enrichment and a rebalancing of civil society—also given the widespread problem of the demographic decline in some parts of the world and the overpopulation of others—but which instead are mostly transformed into social/political contrasts and further forms of segregation. Above all, the theme of the regeneration of urban spaces and the proposition of behavioral models that through new architectures propose new forms of urbanism.

The last important key of interpretation is TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE, which embraces and connects, almost like a common thread, all the construction of cities, regardless of their size and formation, whether derived from transformations of ancient sites or designed ex novo. Today it is no longer possible to envisage a vision of a future city that does not use technologies suitable for the construction of important physical and digital infrastructures, to allow equally fast and effective wide-ranging mobility—from elevators for the distribution of increasingly tall skyscrapers to subways, roads and railways systems that allow high speed travel, the challenge that the builder faces is a daily one, potentially limitless—and to further strengthen the current

processes of sharing that take place at multiple levels—cultural, commercial, financial, political etc.

These, in extreme synthesis, are the reflections that Livio Sacchi's volume on the future of cities opens to the reader; all-encompassing reflections, accompanied by the splendid descriptions of fascinating, highly urbanized places of the contemporary world, in which the city appears, in all its power, to satisfy those possibilities of which we spoke at the beginning; and the provocation of Serge Latouche's “happy degrowth” cannot but come to mind... Thus, perhaps, the question widens and intersects reasonings on ethics and on the concept of limits, in the awareness that even the tensions regarding the future of cities will have to take into account the geographical redesign that the increase in urban expansion involves, with the occupation of waters, high-altitude connections, the leveling of mountains; the transformation of the population, already underway, and the formation of new civil societies; the permanence of the memory of the past; the limitation of environmental degradation.

Not the renunciation, therefore, but the proposition—through the present—of a thought on the future of cities, made up of new models of buildings, of infrastructures, of internal relationships that design for us the cities of the future.

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