

## THE LIMINAL SPACE OF THE GREEN CITY

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### **Abstract**

*The modern cities, while occupying only 2-3% of the land surface, host an astonishing 55% of the world population. As IUCN states, modern cities account for a vast majority of consumption and waste production, main factors leading to the catastrophe of the environment. The lion's share of production is used to provide the big cities with even more resources, and as that need keeps growing, is leading to deforestation and expropriation of the natural environment, something that seems like the story of the death of Pan.*

*While inhabited, those spaces make the residents feel alone and imprisoned. A voluntary prison that seems to have no escape. Recognizing the problem, a solution that often comes up is the one of the green cities, a sustainable inhabitable place. Coming from a capitalistic perspective, whose main objective is pure profit and exploitation, this topic seems to touch the spectrum of fiction and can be considered greenwashing. The modern city keeps growing denser, while leaving no space for the inhabitants. The growth of population in those areas also leaves rural areas deserted and decadent.*

*In theory, a green city might prove to be a valid option, but it is of outmost importance to seek alternative ways of inhabiting spaces, focusing on less density and more means of primary production, distributed as evenly as possible. The importance of the natural environment and the connection of the people with it can prove crucial for the protection of the planet and the growing problem of alienation that the modern human keeps facing. This solution can prove helpful, not only for the environment, but also for the better habitation of people in those areas.*

**Key words:** *Green cities, greenwashing, environmental catastrophe, Urban revision*

### **Introduction**

The summer of 2024 was the hottest summer recorded in the northern hemisphere, marking severe climate anomalies globally. While these phenomena are becoming a new reality, creating new challenges of inhabitation in human settlements worldwide, the social, economic and political structures seem to disregard the constant change, while focusing on marketing capital, using climate change, or catastrophic natural phenomena, to promote new ways of technocratic control. This disregard of human living conditions and the exploitation of resources keep pushing the limit of the need for a constant growing cityscape around the world. There is an importance of recognizing the evident problems that lead to this kind of phenomena and proposing new solutions. While solutions keep focusing on market gain or mildly modifying the cities as a façade to seem more environmentally and resident friendly, the problems that come with urbanization and modern cityscapes will keep recycling.

### **The parasitic nature of modern cityscapes**

The modern cities host more than 4.4 billion people worldwide, making them home to 55% of the human population. This rate reveals its dire nature when, in the current state, modern urban environments are responsible for 75% of natural resource consumption, 80% of energy

consumption, 70% of greenhouse gas emissions and 50% of waste production, while only covering 2-3% of the global land surface. This percentage is rapidly increasing, with studies showing that by 2050, the total number of residents in urban environments will rise to 6.7 billion, leaving non-urban, rural and natural land masses deserted.

A problem that can be detected here is that the modern city has become a place of constant demand of resources, while the only production it is capable of offering is waste. A wasting condition occurs, constantly draining everything around it, like a parasitic entity, that has a never-ending demand for supply into a vast host, leaving earth depleted. The reality is the severe threat of climate breakdown and ecological collapse. The uncontrollable expansion of means of energy production, combined with vast acres of land expropriated, is depleting the natural resources by destroying the natural environment to perpetuate capital to the main technocratic powers.

Combining these data, one can easily realize that the perpetuation of urbanization has created a demand for resources that greatly overcomes the total production, leading to constant drain of resources. This observation can also be traced by example, if the tracing is focused on specific fields regarding the usage of urbanized, or rapid developing areas. Along with the resource depletion, urbanization also leads to cultural and social consequences, such as the commercialization of the public space.

An aspect that plays a significant role, for example, is the ever-growing field of tourism and hedonism. While living in an era that can be characterized as the peak of urbanization, the demand for capital gain keeps pushing further into the commercialization of every aspect of life inside cityscapes. The public spaces are shrinking, in favor of commercial development demand. This phenomenon, alongside other multiple factors, also affects the market value of housing, making it almost impossible to keep the average citizen up with the ever-growing development of urban areas. This is most evident in extreme cases, such as Mumbai, India, where 60% of the population is living in slum areas. Mumbai is a city where the income divide is most visible and can signify the importance of action against modern development.

This topic is difficult to summarize fully on paper, but even this fraction of stats and evident matters tracing can provide anyone with enough information that proves that action is necessary. While the connection of the natural environment and the protection of it is an expanding area, when it is combined with cityscapes and human settlements, reveals an evident fact. In the grand scheme of the planet, time, space and resources occupied by humans are almost insignificant. Humans have occupied the planet for only 0.008% of its 3.7-billion-year history, while the planet is in a constant state of metamorphosis. What makes this matter so important is that it affects the living environment in this period. Ecology is much more than "saving the planet", but it can be characterized by making the best living conditions for the existence of human lives. The factor of ecology, the need for open-air cities and resource diversification and better distribution is vital in creating better living conditions for all humans in the present.

### **The "Green City" concept**

The urgent need to address these matters has led to a consecutive search for solutions and catalysts. One commonly discussed concept is modifying the existing cityscapes and creating new urban areas with certain characteristics. This concept refers to Sustainable cities. Green cities (or sustainable cities) are typically characterized by their focus on certain features that divide them from a typical urban area, usually associated with environmental protection and restoration driven goals.

The UN Environment Programme focuses on maintaining the economic growth of the cities while creating sustainable and livable solutions, focusing mainly on cities in Asia and

the Pacific. The prospect of resource efficient and healthy cityscapes seems appealing and a step in the right direction. The sustainable cities, in theory, seem to have some key characteristics.

- The presence of green spaces within the urban environment
- The use of renewable energy sources, such as wind turbines, solar panels, and biogas.
- Sustainable architecture is also a significant aspect, exemplified by green roofs and the use of eco-friendly materials.
- The integration of green ‘islands’ through the urban fabric, utilizing resilient plants or xeriscaping, is another innovative approach.
- Lastly, the emphasis on creating more open spaces contributes to the overall sustainability of the city

Those are some of the main factors that deem the city, Green. If the above factors are seen as a register, some key points can be observed. While these characteristics define sustainable cities, there are important shortcomings to consider:

- While the main focus is on city density, with proposals such as open green areas, this approach does not address the housing crisis or improve conditions in slum areas.
- Although there are proposals for resilient plants or xeriscaping, they overlook the importance of natural biodiversity, which is essential for a healthy ecosystem.
- While renewable energy sources like wind and solar power are beneficial, they are often located in rural areas, which can result in the destruction of natural habitats. This can result in the destruction of large natural areas and the disturbance of local ecosystems.
- Sustainable architectural practices may prove effective, but they will not provide lasting benefits without regulations that protect natural landscapes and control excessive tourism.
- While open spaces in cities are generally positive, they could lead to the expansion of dense urban areas to meet housing demands, potentially causing significant harm to the surrounding environment.

The alternative we need may require a more radical approach, rather than simply modifying existing cityscapes, to benefit both people and the environment. By reviewing the above register, we can set some new goals. Energy sources should have the least environmental impact possible, capitalizing on the unique strengths of each location. The way we build should focus on the needs of the commons, not the interests of corporations and lastly open spaces should be carefully considered, with the understanding that the natural surroundings of an urban area are still part of the environment.

### **Human derealization and liminal spaces**

The rapid urbanization of cities worldwide has led to overpopulated areas, isolating individuals in a constant state of derealization. That case makes for a state of the individual that could be characterized as liminality. Liminality is a concept that refers to a state of being ‘in between’ or on the threshold of two different states, stages, or places. Derived from the Latin word *limen*, meaning “threshold”, liminality describes a transitional phase where normal rules and structures may not apply, and ambiguity or uncertainty prevails. Liminal spaces are empty or abandoned places that often feel eerie, forlorn, and surreal. These spaces are commonly associated with transition, reflecting the concept of liminality.

The rapidly growing urban environment is used as a place of hosting a constantly moving working force with the sole purpose of an expanding Gross Domestic Product. The individual is in a constant state of productivity to ensure sufficient resources to keep surviving in the urban environment or to expand one’s wealth. The everyday schedule of every resident is to keep functioning accordingly, to keep the city’s way of life. Every misstep of this

process creates a vicious cycle led by technological hedonism and market gain, leaving no place for socializing, inspiration or self-care. This unrelenting push for productivity, coupled with the overwhelming anonymity of urban life, isolates every aspect of the individual's life. Over time, this contributes to a feeling of fragmentation, where individuals feel detached from their surroundings, their communities, and even themselves.

This decline in human experience is connected to the constant modification of the city that keeps evolving to meet the demands of the capital. The urban areas are undergoing a state of development that focuses on commercialization and use the cities as factories or products, rather than human settlements. The concept of the city as a product reflects on the way of life of every resident and defines their everyday lives. In this manner, residents feel that this way of life is the best and only option they have, leading to a deeper state of liminality.

While this phenomenon keeps expanding across the globe, the resource requirements are growing rapidly by the day. This leads to even more exploitation of the natural environment to keep up with these demands. Deforestation is a common practice to largen fields in order to increase the food and goods production, but also to place energy sources like wind turbines. Those modifications of the natural environment have a huge impact on biodiversity, natural formations and the individual characteristics of a place, gentrifying it and making it another alienated site.

As cities continue to expand, the liminal experience becomes more pervasive. Urbanization that emphasizes on productivity and economic growth fosters a sense of isolation where individuals are caught between the need for survival and the absence of social existence, perpetuating emotional and psychological fragmentation.

### **Urban and non-urban revision thoughts**

The strategies proposed are informed by observations in the register, with the aim of sparking a discussion on the future of designing spaces for habitation. The first issue that appears common in both the statistics identifying the problems of modern habitation and the requirement for a sustainable city is the focus on density. While this is indeed a major concern, it must be addressed with caution to avoid undesirable outcomes. The main focus while creating an open-air city is reducing the built-up area and usage of the city center. This will set an example for the rest of the urban fabric. This proposal is a difficult and radical solution that may disorganize the cities for a certain time but will have a great long-lasting outcome. The changes in density should be made gradually and precisely, offering the people new common spaces to occupy and socialize. The infrastructure should be in favor of the residents and occupants of the city, providing them with proper affordable housing, means of transportation, that will also reduce the carbon footprint of the city and easy access to schools, public areas and workplaces. The reorganization of urban fabric should also focus on distributing land usage in a way that supports open spaces, provides communal areas, and facilitates production within the city, with usages like urban gardens. Finally, the city should move away from being a central hub and become more self-sufficient. Instead of depleting resources, it should prioritize better access to rural areas for more balanced resource distribution.

Another effective way to reduce the high density of cities while diversifying land use and production is deurbanization. A key factor for its success is strengthening rural areas and making them more appealing for habitation. A key focus should be the improvement of rural environments, making them more accessible and appealing for human habitation. An important aspect of this is addressing the needs of rural areas, such as access to water and affordable energy. A great number of the residents of those areas are living as farmers. Water and energy are vital for agricultural development and should be provided to strengthen those

occupations. Agriculture can revitalize areas heavily injured by industry, making them a productive part of the environment. But this should not be the only concern when thinking about deurbanization. Rural areas should have diversified uses. Rather than distinguishing between city jobs and rural jobs, employment should be spread across all areas to encourage people to live throughout the region. Encouraging people to expand in a larger area, while diversifying the occupations for different trades can provide an equal habitational fabric that maximizes production while focusing on habitation and the individual's wellbeing. The final step is ensuring proper housing, public access to essential services like hospitals and schools, and establishing means of production that can support the community. The state should be able to provide common goods and services across the country and not only focus on the capital.

A key factor in this transition is alternative production. Currently, most land is controlled by corporations for private gain, rather than focusing on production for the commons. The means of production should prioritize the wellbeing of the residents of an area, rather than expanding in favor of capital. By decommercializing areas dedicated to mass production or depleted by the pollution caused by industries, the creation of spaces with the best living conditions can prove an effective way to face the problem of slums. Another important factor is distance. Local production reduces the need for transportation and eliminates the numerous stages involved in a product's journey. By diversifying the usage and production of an area can be a key factor in ensuring a more even distribution of the human population, with less environmental impact and fewer resource-draining centers. Local reserves can be vital for sustainability and the independence of areas, allowing for more even distribution of resources like water.

This type of production can be facilitated by semi-autonomous societies throughout the area. Local administrative societies tend to be more resourceful and have greater respect for the environment. Local administration can be crucial for the proper development of both urban and natural ecosystems. The people living in an area are more knowledgeable about certain strengths and weaknesses of those areas, that can help with the map problem. The main issue with maps and administration is that, in many cases, maps fail to account for elevation and generalize the use of large, diverse areas. By administering locally rather than on a large scale, it should be easier to manage most of the land area, instead of focusing on specific regions. Tending to the map problem can maximize certain strengths of an area that leads to more resourceful management. Resource distribution should also be a key priority, particularly in areas with limited access to natural resources or where farming and gardening are challenging. Additionally, local administration encourages people to care more about the places they live in, rather than those they don't. They once again connect with their natural surroundings, creating the best living conditions.

Finally, inhabiting spaces with a closer connection to nature can be beneficial for both the well-being of residents and the environment, helping to prevent the encroachment and destruction of natural land. Better communication and a closer connection with the natural environment should help prevent people from feeling alienated. The reintroduction of both people and cities to the natural environment should improve physical and mental health, reducing feelings of liminality. Common control of production should be crucial in stopping excessive production and the environmental destruction it causes. Finally, this could offer a new way to reevaluate habitation and the role of the city, helping people feel more connected and purposeful.

### **Possible outcomes and the future of cities**

A new approach to the city, or the urban environment in general, must be carefully considered. It should consider modern sustainability practices while also critiquing them. The theory

posits that only a radical shift in how we inhabit our spaces can yield the desired results, and the steps to achieve this form the foundation of this theory. While this is indeed a radical approach, it is something that can be conquered gradually and with the least environmental and social impact. This type of urban healing idea and alternative ways of habitation can be loosely trace back to Doxiadis and the Ekistics. But rather than heading for the idea of the Ecumenopolis, this theory proposes that the best way to heal the problems of the modern cityscape is diversification of uses and autonomous collectives that respect the environment, the residents and the culture of each region respectfully. The state of liminality is a modern theory that is the product of the time and should be addressed as such. By facing this problem, the closed city becomes evident.

In conclusion, the urban environment of the future must undergo a radical transformation to address the pressing challenges of climate change, resource depletion, and social inequality. Current solutions, such as the “Green City” concept, offer some promise but fall short by failing to address the root causes of urban issues, such as resource consumption, waste production, and the commercialization of public space. A more sustainable approach requires not just minor modifications to existing cityscapes but a fundamental shift in how we design, inhabit, and produce in our urban environments.

To move toward a better future of human settlements, we must prioritize a more decentralized model that promotes deurbanization, strengthens rural areas, and emphasizes local production and resource distribution. Cities should evolve from being resource-draining hubs to self-sufficient, eco-friendly communities that coexist harmoniously with the natural environment.

The desired outcome is a more refined and diversified urban environment that focuses on coexisting with the natural world, using its resources respectfully, and proposing a new way of designing cities in harmony with the environment. While there may be counterpoints to this essay, its aim is to spark a conversation about the future of cities during the climate crisis, with an emphasis on the well-being of every resident. This essay aims to emphasize the need for coexistence between urban and natural environments. It advocates for cities that are not parasitic, draining resources and producing pollution, but instead can coexist with and protect the natural world, while providing a better quality of life for all their residents.

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