

Editorial and Abstracts

Editorial. A New Foundation. Without Words
Carlo Olmo

For an “enthusiast” of the many connections that can be evoked (and studied) between cities and democracy, the present as the sole condition of being in today’s world is already destabilising. Without history, the city/civitas cannot exist. However, its already precarious status has long been undermined by two processes that confront us daily: urbicide and the identity strategies of those who perpetrate this crime. Urbicide and the obsession with identity render almost untenable one of the foundational expressions of Western culture: the pairing of city and democracy. Since the time of Periclean Athens and the founding of Thurii, the political and military strategy has been to link colonies to political structures and to export democracy through the occupation of foreign territories. This approach failed then, and the long history of newly founded cities tied to specific models of social organisation only confirms its shortcomings. These “new cities” are haunted by worn-out rhetoric and lingering ghosts. The first and most recurrent of these is the promise of security from “otherness,” whether social, cultural, or religious. The second is the claim to belong to a new internationalism, enriched by a variety of formalistic disvalues. The third is an exaggerated emphasis on environmental concerns, while land and economic and natural resources are exploited with little respect for the material and social history of the sites. These new cities are inherently flawed and illustrate in an elaborate and almost baroque way the contemporary trivialisation of architecture, especially when pursued on a large scale and supported by powerful actors. If architecture is to endure and not be reduced to a mere game of forms and dimensions, it must respond to the questions posed by place and history.

It is striking that, despite so many complications, none of these new settlements succeeds in replacing the term “city” with other words. This is an abuse, a less explicit one than a history that is not even the “colonial” one that surveys – long before Geddes – tried to intercept. To move beyond this, perhaps battered and bruised, it might be useful, if not necessary, to return at least to Lewis Mumford’s trilogy on the city. This would allow us to resume an epistemological reflection that, this time, truly decolonises language and narrative. But to do this, it would be essential to put an end to the use and abuse of history and the triumph of exclusively synchronic imaginaries. If there is one human creation that is inherently diachronic, it is architecture and the city.

Helping to reflect, allowing ourselves to be questioned by places, even when we disagree with the values they inspire – as this issue of *Rassegna* does – is the first and most difficult step that can help us to construct a relationship between words and things. Without this, we

would fall back into the homogeneous and neutral space where things “viendraient à la fois manifester l’ordre continue de leurs identités ou de leurs différences et le champ sémantique de leur dénomination.”

Today, there is a collective way of thinking about new cities, based on a combination of ideologies, interests and imaginaries, which is hegemonic because this way of thinking is based on shared objectives, not on theories, let alone experiments. On the contrary, it is necessary to open a scientific reflection on newly founded cities, based on observation and comparison, but also on historical and anthropological research, in the full knowledge that we are confronted with a social creation that is profoundly different from what Ludwik Fleck theorised when he spoke of a collective style of thinking! It is to this reflection by Fleck that we must return.

DEBATE

Rawabi: Palestine Dream? *Fabrizio Toppetti*

Rawabi is the first Palestinian city, *designed for Palestinians*, and planned from the ground up in the heart of the West Bank. Located in Area A – an area at least nominally under the control of the Palestinian Authority – it is close to Ramallah and occupies a strategic position on an elevation of about 800 metres above sea level, from which it takes its name. In Arabic, Rawabi means “hill.”

My visit dates to November 2022. The attack of 7 October last year and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict make the presence of this city even more contradictory, dissonant, and challenging, raising numerous questions. Reflecting on it today, amidst images of Gaza devastated by bombs, gives this reflection an even deeper meaning.

The city was born out of the vision of Bashar Al Masri, a visionary Palestinian businessman and president of Massar International, a company active in various sectors including finance, real estate, new technologies, communications, and logistics. The project was launched in Bethlehem in 2008 during the Palestine Investment Conference, with the aim of initiating Palestine’s integration into the global economy. In the following years, the idea materialised through an agreement with the Palestinian Authority and the government of Qatar, which became a strategic partner and co-financier of the project.

The masterplan foresees a self-sufficient settlement designed to accommodate up to 40,000 people, spread across six high-density residential compartments built around the Q Centre, the commercial heart of the city.

Geopolitics and Architecture: Different Interests and Common Perspectives

Edoardo Boria, Piero Casacchia

The relationship between architecture and geopolitics has not been extensively explored in the academic literature, and this article does not aim to fill that gap. However, by examining the founding cities of the new millennium from a geopolitical perspective, it is possible to highlight certain key aspects of this relationship, starting from their common spatial roots.

The reflection begins with the observation that among the various practices of political action that influence power dynamics, some involve architectural knowledge. Indeed, power cannot avoid questioning the geopolitical functions of places.

Given that any project of power is embodied in places and must involve both physical artefacts and inhabitants in order to control their meanings and identities, how can the effectiveness of strategies related to these cities be assessed in terms of their intended political objectives? Are there already signs that allow us to evaluate recent cases? Can lessons be drawn from these experiences to identify recurrent mistakes made by political authorities when using architecture as a tool?

In order to answer these questions, the article methodologically adopts the concept of transcalarity, inherent to both geopolitical and architectural studies. This concept is particularly appropriate because the reasons for the creation of these cities, as well as their effects, are obviously transcalar in nature.

Founding Reconstruction, Exercises of Urban Proxemics

Benno Albrecht, Jacopo Galli

The paper faces the tool of foundation as a possible, or rather an obliged, answer to the current conditions of destruction of numerous areas involved in major conflicts. The first section sheds light on the necessity of establishing new urban centres or neighbourhoods to face the challenges of reconstruction by highlighting the available data and showing how the vastness of destruction in certain locations will not allow for a rapid reconstruction in already urbanised areas. The second section analyses the current processes of new foundation in the Levant region and inserts them critically in the response mechanisms to urbicides. The lack of overall quality and capacity to affect positive change in the processes of urban formation is related directly to the political and economic mechanisms that guide such intervention. The third and final section of the paper deals with the required new urban models and design tools for the redefinition of mechanisms of urban foundation. The establishment and control of a growing evolutionary mechanism guided by urban triggers is to be considered as a necessary system that will allow to define a new approach to the definition and control of urban settlements. Proxemics, intended as the discipline able to define the set distances between different elements and induce positive human behaviour, is to be considered as a fruitful field of exercise in which to pose hopes and aspirations in an innovative and useful new foundation.

From "Go Global" to "Global South": China's Expansion in the Southern World

Francesca Spigarelli

The paper provides an analysis of the current trends in Chinese industrial policies, focusing on the connection between globalization, urbanization, and China's soft power projects in the "Global South," including urban planning initiatives.

The text describes the backdrop of contemporary geopolitical tensions, where an Atlantic bloc, coordinated by the United States, contrasts with an alternative coalition that China is attempting to consolidate in the "Global South." Embracing a multipolar world vision, Beijing has built a new team of allies – primarily emerging and developing countries in the southern hemisphere – who seek an active role in global geopolitics. The "Global South" has thus become a focal point for Chinese diplomacy through initiatives like the "Go Global" policy, which, in recent years, has supported economic investment of Chinese firms, infrastructure projects, and urbanization.

Using loans from Chinese state banks and competitive offers from state-managed or state-backed construction companies, countries in the Global South have welcomed Chinese construction projects, including residential complexes, offices, hotels, and other urban developments designed in China. Beyond large-scale infrastructure projects, Chinese-managed and -funded companies also engage in urban development, creating residential areas, hotels, and office buildings to establish new commercial hubs.

The paper examines some examples of such actions, particularly in Africa, looking at both the policies supporting China's diplomatic, economic, and cultural influence and the resulting impacts. The paper also provides insights into the link between Chinese globalization, industrial policies, and the expansion of industries connected to urbanization.

A Geography of Cities Established in the New Millennium

Fabrizio Toppetti, Viola Bertini

The proposal to devote this issue of the magazine to the theme of the new millennium's founding cities stems from the hypothesis that the phenomenon is of crucial importance at this historical moment. This is due to its significant impact on geopolitical and economic balances, the ways in which global powers assert and express themselves, and the symbolic values that these cities acquire on the international stage. It is a complex and multifaceted issue of global proportions that is generally underestimated and under-researched.

Some of these cities are created by the will of local governments, while others are the result of private enterprise and the massive involvement of international investment funds. Still others are the outcome of initiatives by fast-growing countries that see opportunities for expansion in the Global South.

The map on these pages illustrates the distribution of new cities that have been conceived from scratch and whose construction has been completed, initiated, or just announced to the international community since the year 2000.

The data presented is the result of overlaying two databases developed by the *International New Town Institute* (INTI) and the *Charter Cities Institute* (CCI).

The overall picture is of a new and evolving geography in which spaces, timelines, social balances, and economic forces are intertwined, offering an unprecedented image of the world, and potentially anticipating scenarios of spatial habitats in extra-terrestrial environments.

RESEARCHES

From a Slab of Desert. Masdar City in Abu Dhabi *Viola Bertini*

In 2007, the government of the United Arab Emirates unveiled the Masdar City project to the international community. This completely new settlement is located on the same desert terrain from which the skyscrapers of Abu Dhabi rise 17 kilometres away. In a region where the average annual temperature is around 30 degrees Celsius, rainfall is scarce, snow is only found on indoor ski slopes, and over 40% of GDP is still tied to oil, the construction of a city powered entirely by renewable energy and designed to eliminate all waste was launched. The project was entrusted to the British firm Foster + Partners, whose design choices, while driven by the need to achieve the sustainability goals that underpin the project, also reflect an architectural vision that goes beyond functionality. Indeed, it incorporates elements from the Arab-Islamic repertoire, creating a narrative of identity based on invention and serving the broader purpose of projecting power and image that underpins the initiative as a whole.

The economic crisis of 2008 and subsequent budget cuts drastically reduced the original expectations. To date, only part of the plan has been completed, with significant changes. Of the original 50,000 residents, just over 4,000 currently live in the city, mostly concentrated around the activities of the Masdar Institute. The few non-promotional videos available online show technologically advanced buildings and public spaces, but they appear lifeless. Moreover, the city, which was originally designed to be carbon-neutral, is now partly dependent on Abu Dhabi's electricity grid. The achievable utopia has proved anything but, yet it is still presented as such on the website of the company that sponsors and manages it. In a global context where new planned cities range from highly diverse to architecturally absent, the Masdar City project stands out for its evocative power and formal specificity. Yet the project is not without rhetoric, revolving around themes of identity and sustainability, and using widely recognised symbols and ideas associated with these concepts. Balancing between self-orientation, greenwashing and commercial enterprise, the city has accumulated opacities and contradictions, raising questions about the real objectives of the initiative and the paths taken to achieve them, which this paper aims to explore.

Indefiniteness and Finitude: City in the Desert, OMA 2006

Filippo De Dominicis

In 2006, after curating an exhibition entitled *The Gulf* at the Venice Biennale, OMA developed a proposal for a new city in the desert. Circumstances in which the design can be inscribed are multiple and not clear. Widely

advertised as the initial step of a structural plan for the Emirate of Ras Al-Khaimah, City in the Desert was then conveyed as a model city built somewhere in the remote south of Abu Dhabi, in the so-called Empty Quarter. Whatever the case is, City in the Desert represents one of the first attempts the firm undertook to get a foothold in the region and provide a response to issues raised at the Venice venue. At the same time, City in the Desert is also a manifesto of OMA's attitude towards the crisis of modern architecture at large. In this sense, the proposal can be understood not simply as a reaction to specific tasks but rather as a program rooted in the history of OMA. This paper attempts to navigate City in the Desert's multiple contradictions and leaps, including its simultaneity, with the aim to retrace its conceptual and morphological pedigree and anchor its design to issues characterizing Koolhaas' early formulations and practice.

Astana, a Simulacrum of a New Urban Reality *Leone Spita*

Astana serves as a significant example for a critical study of foundation cities, akin to Brasília or Canberra. The city represents a planned outcome of a new master plan, resulting on one hand from the economic opportunities afforded by the Country's position within the global energy sector, and on the other hand from the will of President Nazarbayev. The initial phase of the Astana project, spearheaded by Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa, involved a master plan designed to create a city capable of growing and expanding like a living organism, incorporating the key concepts of: metabolism, metamorphosis, and symbiosis. Despite this innovative approach, the plan proved to be undersized as it insufficiently accounted for the dynamics of population growth in the capital and the pace of Kazakhstan's economic development. The urban landscape of the capital appears to be characterized by stylistic contrasts. A careful investigation reveals that, 25 years after its foundation, the city emerges as an open-air laboratory of architectural experimentation, where buildings are designed to astonish. Astana's diverse architectural palette embodies various iterations of independent Kazakhstan's national identity, celebrating local character through the use of indigenous ornaments and symbols or references to the country's folklore, thus marking a departure from the Soviet Union. Cutting-edge projects by renowned architects express the country's technological aspirations and ambitions for progress and international recognition.

Kurokawa, Arup and Isozaki. New Towns in China *Leonardo Ramondetti*

This article investigates how different design cultures have addressed the challenges posed by the Chinese urbanisation trends of the past 25 years. To this end, this paper examines the projects by Kisho Kurokawa Architects & Associates, Arup, and Isozaki & HuQian Partners for the urban expansion of Zhengzhou (9 million inhabitants), the capital of the Henan Province in the Central Plains of China. This development, currently underway, has unfolded in three phases, each exemplifying shifts in the Chinese economy and urban trends. In the early 2000s, Kurokawa won the international competition for Zhengdong New District: a 150-square-kilometre devel-

opment to double the existing city with an iconic polynuclear urbanization plan. In 2009, a new competition was launched to expand this new town into a 100-kilometre linear city: Zhengbian New District. This was won by Arup, with a plan that organises the new development into a vast urban park, accommodating a diverse range of urban materials to meet the demands of the growing real estate market. Finally, since the 2010s, Isozaki has been entrusted with overseeing the implementation of Kurokawa's plan, including the design of various buildings and open spaces. In reaction to the previous massive process of urbanisation, Isozaki revised the Central Plains of China as a constellation of places to be signified by high-quality architecture and small-scale interventions. The sum of the design activities for Zhengdong and Zhengbian New Districts has turned the urban development of the Central Plains of China as a testbed where prominent architectural firms have experimented with visions and solutions for the contemporary city. At the same time, the radical pace of Chinese urbanisation also highlights the limitations of these proposals, soliciting for new approaches to the design of new towns.

The Malaysian Forest City. The Unfinished Utopia of the Smart City *Cristian Sammarco*

Forest City is in Malaysia. Forest City, however, does not exist. It is one of the ghost cities that were abandoned before they were even finished. A new land archipelago, a futuristic smart city, a large forest in continuity with the surrounding landscape. Forest City was to be a territorial hinge on which to divert and catalyse the economic flows of one of Asia's special economic macro zones, just 2 km from Singapore. A Smart City model based on the triad of safety, comfort and sustainability. All that remains of all this is a fragment, an artificial sod with no forest and commercials trying to attract new investments. What remains are abandoned skyscrapers that have never become forests. No citizens but only sporadic visitors.

The theme of cities as "intelligent forests" opens up the architectural debate to the Utopia of the contemporary founding city – in a world, ours, where everything seems possible – and Rem Koolhaas in his book *Texts on the (no longer) city* states that "in front of Utopia, the architect is placed in an impossible situation more than anyone else. Without reference to Utopia, his work has no real value, but by associating himself with it he almost inevitably makes himself complicit in crimes of greater or lesser gravity." Crimes are against the stratified environmental palimpsests that are inhabited by architectures without an organic relationship with the landscape and that do not give the city a face.

The Utopian Sprawl of the New Visible Cities. Kilamba Cidade, a Model of Urban Development in Angola

Manlio Michieletto

The central African cities, which initially emerged as pioneer outposts, grew according to pre-established master plans and obeyed the principles of tropical life while maintaining a high degree of segregation between Europeans and indigenous peoples. In terms of design and not just physical construction, the city intended as

architecture is an evolving composition. The new towns that emerged in Angola under the pressure of Sino-African cooperation represent a discontinuity in urban and architectural terms with the recent past when architects have tried to intertwine the local necessities with the built and unbuilt context. The case of the capital city of Angola, Luanda and its satellite, Kilamba, tells a story written in the last twenty years by a precise leader, China, that subsidises and marks the African countries' growth and development. For years, seen as ghost cities, these new founding towns have been occupied and revalued more for their ability to fill a political void in providing "safe" neighbourhoods and for the desire for the emancipation of a part of society. Since 2012, the CITIC, a Chinese construction company, has been engaged in building the cidade of Kilamba, injecting into the estate market around 20,000 housing units all based on a unique type, the tall building – the apartment block model consisting of different typological variations classified according to the size of the units. The research enquires about not only the physical construction of a new city but also the exchange of know-how and technical support with oil and mineral resources necessary to feed the internal industrial apparatus of China. After massive internal urban politics, the Asiatic country exported the practice of building new African cities to sort out the uncontrolled urban growth issue.

Designing the Moon Village

Georgi Petrov, Colin Koop, David Vanderhof

In 2018, the European Space Agency (ESA) and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) began a collaboration to develop design concepts for the first permanent human settlement on the lunar surface. SOM's design proposal combines space industry expertise with knowledge from the realms of architecture, urban planning, science, and psychology to create an environment in which humans will be able to survive and thrive on the Moon.

This article details the team's holistic approach to the architecture design and spatial planning of a lunar development. Our team evaluated a range of potential sites for the settlement and ultimately selected a strategic site on the Moon's south pole. The Moon Village is composed of modular habitation units, which can be easily assembled and combined on the Moon's surface to allow for phased expansion of the settlement. The team considered historical urban planning precedents, from grid systems to linear plans, to develop a planning model that is suited to the unique conditions and challenges of lunar life. The master plan is composed of four linear bands of development, each dedicated to a key function, and it reserves a significant portion of the site as a pristine lunar preserve. By bringing together insight from architecture, urban planning, and space industry expertise, this collaborative project represents an innovative model for envisioning and designing communities beyond Earth.