The Routledge Handbook of Henri Lefebvre, The City and Urban Society

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Right to the city or to the planet?

Publication details
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Published online on: 05 Dec 2019

How to cite: Marcelo Lopes de Souza. 05 Dec 2019, Right to the city or to the planet? from: The Routledge Handbook of Henri Lefebvre, The City and Urban Society Routledge Accessed on: 04 Aug 2023

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Introduction

Half a century ago, people claimed that housing ought to represent a service, that everyone had rights to a city. In America and Europe students and workers marched in demonstrations, and not always peacefully. Urban planners, political scientists, philosophers and sociologists alike have all studied the issue and offered their own theories and solutions, as well. Many theories and poorly tested solutions were widely criticised. In the 1970s I was attracted to works by Henri Lefebvre and Manuel Castells, but the former did not believe in urban planning (but see the chapter by Leary-Owhin in Part 6) and the latter supported urban conflict. I believed in urban planning as a science, in political commitment, in Bologna’s public building plan and in municipal standards for social services. Things that Lefebvre did not believe in:

It often happens that talented men believe themselves to be at the centre of knowledge and experience whereas they remain at the centre of systems of writing, projections on paper, visualizations. Architects tending on their part towards a system of significations which they often call ‘planning’, it is not impossible for analysts of urban reality, grouping together their piecemeal facts, to constitute a somewhat different system of significations that they can also baptize planning while they leave its programming to machines.

(Lefebvre, in Kofman and Lebas 1996: 117)

I had no doubts that reformism and urbanistic solidity could limit social imbalances during that period of political turmoil. I searched for practical and theoretical confirmation in the work of Lefebvre and Castells. These were the years of voracious studies that led to my first outline (Marescotti 1979). I never was an architect and at last I became a planner. Much has changed over time.

Another, perhaps fraudulent, message prevailed, saying that property would be a wise savings investment. What we have experienced in recent years is a spreading global crisis, triggered by the housing bubble and consequent subprime mortgages: houses were no longer a service but the financial instruments of the few, who betrayed not only personal investments, but also the
state-citizen social pact. The costs are borne by the weaker classes while profits flow up to a few collectors.

Unlimited economic expansion strategies generated an unprecedented financial crisis that has overwhelmed the environment and societies; inequalities and climate change are only secondary effects in a race for profits. Too many voices overlap, producing noise and confusion. Some people hope for technological miracles; someone provides disasters; others wait to replenish their resources with a smile and a show of confidence: do not panic, they say.

The new urban dimension is an ‘ecumenopolis’ (Doxiadis 1968) that develops in irregular reticulates composed of glittering metropolitan areas, factories as large as cities and amusement towns interspersed with gigantic slums and abandoned areas dominated by illegal occupations until they are renovated and redefined as a luxury. The economic, political and social dynamics were missing from Doxiadis’ global conurbation, but I found them in Sassen (1994) and Harvey (1989). I encountered Lefebvre once again.

Cities full of so-called sustainable technologies grow in new areas and new factory cities are established that do not differ in any way from the terrible beginnings of the English industrial revolution. Old disciplines and policies are no longer of any use for shaping a future based on a new urban system, in which suburbs and business centres are no longer localised phenomena, but rather a hotchpotch scattered around the world. The Earth is a complex socio-ecological system and the biosphere is in a metastable equilibrium manipulated by human actions. We possess powerful tools and huge machines and we believe in continuous progress, to what end? Questions with no reassuring answers.

What is to be done? The answer lies in governing politics to govern the land. Although analyses on the productivity of urban areas have improved, urban planning as a discipline is still embedded within administrative procedures. This is the opinion which I have developed over the years while I was looking for potential building blocks to establish urban planning as a science in an environmental sphere. I have never been a Lefebvrian, but the seeds of his reasoning intrigued me and worked on my subconscious, to shape my research.

Similar cities, standardised cities

A technical outlook took hold again in the 1980s and 1990s, but politics fostered a drift in the discipline despite Cassandra’s warnings (Harvey 1989; Davis 1994; 2002; 2008): we had to learn, because we only see what we know about. I look at affluent countries: similar cities, standardised cities, which are not the result of errors in the discipline, but rather the success of capitalist planning. We live in a great urban mosaic whose individual tiles are connected but do not fit together: but can it still be called a city, a venue of politics? The historic urban revolution continues all over the world and changes nature: metropolitan areas, urban regions, ecumenopolis, where all forms of integration presuppose a vast literature, supported by social, economic, formal, functional or structural analysis. We must fully understand what is happening on Earth.

I see cities with their uniqueness and identity violated, dominated by simple thoughts and powerful technologies. These cities could be located anywhere in the world, they have no cosmopolitan ambitions; they only exist to provide goods to simplified consumers. At the same time, I see territories designed with wisdom and others ravaged by ignorance. Perhaps we are witnessing something new, based on a single and pervasive way of life: the Anthropocene ecumenopolis, inhabited by more than 4 billion people (2016). So this is the context: we are able to think and to know as never before; despite this, we are unable to reconcile what we have learned and what we are teaching with the changes that are altering the environment and society. These
changes give new meanings to the words: the urban space has invaded entire regions; it colonises the subconscious and models our sense of time, rhythms and desires.

Victor Hugo wrote ‘Ceci tuera cela. Le livre tuera l’édifice’ (Hugo 1865: 93), meaning that books would replace architecture and become the new popular medium for narration. Unfortunately, what we are encountering now is much worse: technology is killing art, as the new emblem of supremacy in the context of global competitions which are conducted less and less by states and more and more by private enterprise. While competition among kings and princes once depended upon the splendour of public and private spaces with the allure of their artists, nowadays industrial and financial empires are competing with the height of their skyscrapers. The Professor’s Dream, a Charles Robert Cockerell watercolour (1848), depicting ancient monuments superimposed into a single image, has been transformed into a comparison of the highest and strangest pomposities of technologies prevailing over representation. The seeds of change were planted in Las Vegas: no time to rest and reflect, only entertainment is allowed, for a fee, and the purpose of those exciting shapes, lights, sounds and atmosphere is just to reap money in, to alienate the mind through the imitation of other places, or childhood myths. It mimics urban qualities and it is amazing, but it is nothing more than a ‘non-place’ in which all the details are calculated to annihilate the individual. Space for the representation of whom?

Then the experiment became a contagious model and spread to other places for the masses, from amusement parks to shopping centres, fake worlds offering false savings; even historical sites have become destinations for fast tourism, where the most terrible aspect is the consumption of time, the alienation from poetry. Lefebvre himself called for poetry to overcome the geometric and timeless approach to producing space (Lefebvre 1991). I now see his calls as trans-disciplinary openings to the complexities of planning.

It really seems that no one wants to envisage wise alternatives. Cities and their historical centres are under siege by business centres, skyscrapers, advertising images and by worldwide fashion brands and ethnic restaurants: all different in their outward appearance, all the same in essence. Global goods which standardise desires, in shopping centres which are monsters devouring territories and personalities, are all tuned in to an absurd race to the ephemeral. Their success lies in the progressive elimination of all other alternatives, in war and in peace. Dreams of democracy and emancipation have been replaced by a non-citizen-consumer reality, supported by a fantasy, manipulated by a repetitive collection of symbols. The same logic creeps in even during wartime: the enemies’ cities and places of art and faith are destroyed or dismembered by smuggling. After the war, will the cities be rebuilt according to the latest fashion? The poor do not comply? It does not matter, they are not consumers, but they will not be excluded; something can be taken from them, too.

Both the physical city and its society are unified in ‘polis’, in a ‘political’ being. As we move on from words to urban experience, we can observe a double coherence between city and society, because the shape of one moulds the existence of the other, and vice versa. Technological architecture encompasses both a physical shape and international finances: one stands for the other and in doing so they promote systemic developments. While ancient Greek aristocracy put its citizens in first place, the individual is pushed to submission as a consumer in modern cities. Society is divided and there are enormous differences between the haves and the marginalised have-nots, who are either unaware or devoutly integrated. These coherences between urban and social systems are the mirror of reshuffled values through which new identities can arise. Which ones? This is not yet known; the future is open.

The challenge is to reduce economic and financial exploitation and react to pervasive standardisation, indifference to the multiple cultural identities which make cities and regions so fascinating. The priorities of urban planning lie in freedom, emancipation, urban creativity and the
transformation of urban reality into protection of the environment. There is a long road ahead full of misconceptions: we must still learn how to inhabit the Earth.

Inhabiting the Earth

Inhabit the Earth, then! Be conscious; look at landscapes with fresh eyes, because everything we need and belongs to us can be found there. Individual or national selfishness, utilitarianism and corruption cause bulimic hoarding and ignore the human condition. That is senseless; to inhabit the Earth is, more than ever and above all, a necessity to politics; ‘fraternity, equality and liberty’ must overcome all borders. On this urban planet the duality and contrast between cities and countryside, or state and citizens, have no reasons to exist: we are all citizens of the world. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) must be voted anew, because it must be applied in every country, because the right to inhabit the Earth in peace (Heidegger 1971: 147), free from poverty and fears, must be given to everyone.

The agricultural revolution took place just ten thousand years ago thanks to a temperate Holocene, and five thousand years ago came the urban revolution in the Fertile Crescent. Urban supremacy consolidated in five centuries through social classes, functional specialisations, writings and thoughts on democracy: no longer phratries, but citizens and societies organised under a Divine King who could govern through power and scribes. It was the beginning of urban and social history.

Worldwide urban revolutions would follow this course without ever being repetitive. The idea of a city always took shape in a singular way, in form and content, and maintained the single living matrix of a village: to be in a safe place, full of water, food and raw materials. These were the principles on which the selection of locations was based, these were the original characteristics which supported the first cities and urban societies. The territories of the city widened beyond the ecological niche, tracing routes through lands, rivers and seas. The borders were interfaces, fringes of contamination or raids. Natural capitals and population, trade and invasions, peace and wars were the main drivers of the growth and death of a city, but also of the transition from a city-state to a territory-state, a fundamental step to overcoming dependence on local resources. Two millennia later, we find proof of the ‘crisis’ generated by the gap between demographic growth and carrying capacity in ancient Greek colonies, but the limits of their resources appear to have been local episodes that were easily overcome by occupying new lands.

People are increasingly attracted to cities, but they change their habits and lifestyles without ceasing war and carnage. There are no more continents to explore; the frontiers of outer space are easier to explore than those between us and others, influenced by cultural and geopolitical boundaries. Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it: and then? Even if Garrett Hardin acknowledged that freedom to breed is intolerable, his responses and the recognition of necessity are ideological, not scientific (Hardin 1968).

Urban systems are connected together to exploit the poorest members of the population. Industrial manufacturers move where they find a cheaper workforce, because other factors such as raw materials and food can now be found and distributed everywhere, whatever the distance. One just has to pay and be aware that the commodity-money-commodity and the money-commodity-money cycles are inseparable and operate globally at such a speed that material goods turn into virtual goods: a brick is not as solid as it seems. We should have known, because something similar happened in 1873. How can we break away? Although our knowledge has increased, we try to ignore that the world’s regions are a single living system and that we are all citizens of the world, with equal rights and dignity.
Proud as always, we have triggered unpredictable, perhaps radical changes with unforeseeable consequences, although some warning signs can be inferred from local and global changes. We pretend that oases, forests and woods are immense, that rivers can be manipulated, and we reject the proof of the absurdity of these claims. An urban planet: this is the last stage of Lefebvre’s urban revolution in continuous acceleration. Cities occupy a tiny percentage of land but devour energy and fertile lands to feed their metabolism. Technology enables everything. It is possible to build in the desert, to build on the sea and to fill the world with greenhouses, even vertical ones. One just has to pay. But money does not regenerate nature, it does not compensate for climate changes. We can send people into space, but they can only go there if enormous human and natural resources are extracted from around the world to bring colossal wealth to the few. Money is nothing more than the expression of social relations: imbalances expose different ways of exerting dominion.

Cities will possibly double in extension over the next 20 years and a few affluent decision-makers will dominate and subjugate many proletarians. Or what should we call them, since their offspring will no longer be their wealth? Over the last two centuries innovations have developed faster, the British industrial revolution and advances in hygiene (another revolution) necessitated urbanisation, but administrators were unprepared. The unimaginable and unstoppable urban sprawl of industrial cities quickly became part of the myopic strategies that combined economic power with the size of cities and profits from great differential earnings. The story is well known: there is no break in progressive growth; each step has developed at an increasingly rapid pace from one phase to another, from one country to another. The frenzy has not stopped, nor does it seem possible for anyone to stop it. The word ‘planning’ means houses, industries, schools and public places; the construction industry is the economic basis for other productive sectors; expansion spreads around the planet, it flows through all countries. Property has become an asset haven, agriculture largely swings between industrialisation and a luxury pastime, the ‘natural’ value of the soil and environmental protection has been forgotten: natural capital is the source of all capitals.

The symbolic value of architecture dominates everything in diverse forms, but in the late 19th century William Morris sensed a change of an extraordinary scale in architecture: ‘A great subject truly, for it embraces the consideration of the whole external surroundings of the life of man; we cannot escape from it if we would so long as we are part of civilisation, for it means the moulding and altering to human needs of the very face of the earth itself, except in the outermost desert’ (Morris 1910–15, XXII: 119). It is a radical innovation that transcends his own words, if read in the light of the current knowledge of human environmental impacts, well aware of how difficult it is to identify all their effects: the environment is not a matter of aesthetics! The issue concerns survival, but few strive to build a science to develop theories and then compare, validate, refute them. Do we lack laboratories and experimentation? The biosphere, the environment, territories, landscapes, multiform cities: here is the laboratory, here are our experiments, but we are blind without a science.

Wizards and alchemists

Planning practices pose restrictions on scientific development, but theoretical attempts also appear to be in disarray. We need resources and freedom to build science and theories, to share criteria and methods. Urban analysis and the comparison of environmental observations, as well as philosophical or literary reflections, are all necessary frames of reference for building an ambitious overarching vision that can offer interpretative and operational tools. All the attempts have certainly provided interesting interpretations, they have overcome theoretical critique and
offered instruments for land use planning that have been applied all over the world. However, despite the best intentions, scientific ambitions have only rarely been supported by direct analysis of territorial transformations, so they have missed the objective to substantiate theoretical hypotheses with aftermath analysis. Lack of evidence has limited effectiveness and led to conceptual schemes, insinuations and statements which not only are inapplicable in other contexts, but may even lack experimental verification.

The origin of many contributions was confined to the needs of an academic career, or to clearly and concisely describe the contents of the discipline to students through interpretive categories. However, a brief survey will show that the theoretical structure hardly resists the first verification of consistency. If each one of us drew up a list of authors to study to become urban planners, we would reach different results that would probably denote our age groups. Each list would simply be a trace of possible, individually significant pathways, but today’s students might find other approaches. Different cultures in time and space are facing each other without common cornerstones: a jumble of ideas like no other.

However, I affirm that logic is not enough to make order between definitions and hypotheses to reach a scientific vision; we need ways to face reality and validate or refute conventional professional practices. This is the point: habits consistently dominate the process in three ways to mould the discipline and tuition: scientific reductionism, localised vision and property assets.

1. The first constant is scientific reductionism. The action and the area of interest are conceptually and territorially forced into watertight compartments. Reductionism operates in empirical destructured ways that are artificially complicated by rules to avoid monitoring transformations. Reductionism consolidates through four, perhaps not strictly consequential, stages:

- **Planning without programming**: It is not a public authority but rather private interests that decide when and where investments are to be made. Legitimacy does not lie in a response to needs for housing, services, jobs, but only in the market. There is a return to the supremacy of arbitrary use of power in a legally constituted state.

- **Nullification of the strategic plan**: one talks of process to keep a strong connection between socio-economic transformations and planning. Environmental assessments without measurable objectives have no scientific structure. Ideologies and persuasive discussions prevail over the plan. Only rich regions can afford the cost of strategies, while small municipalities and the least developed countries can only make short-term decisions. The neo-liberalism wave pushes the state out, it diminishes its roles and it merges public law into private law: the era of reformism closes by acceptance of the market, even by the political left. Urban planning is not explicitly mentioned in the Italian constitutional reform of 2001. It is a ‘residual matter’ (Repubblica Italiana 2001: article 117).

- **Emphasis on architecture and urban design**: Form is the whole. The metamorphosis is complete. It is worth remembering the Masonic Plan for Democratic Rebirth (1982) as the first ever evidence of the neo-liberalism momentum. In that confidential document, socio-economic measures called for anti-urbanisation laws, invested in satellite towns and reduced land use planning to a science of suburban rapid transit (Camera dei Deputati, Senato della Repubblica 1985: 622–3). These few words are not to be underestimated: although it was not a criminal plan, despite the chosen criminal methods, it must not be confused with Aldo Rossi’s architecture of the city, or with some urban planning attempts of the 1980s (such as Bologna and Madrid in 1985) which aimed to promote the importance of architecture to speed up the implementation of
the plan. One can possibly find some kinship with circumstances in other countries and universities, where land use planning has been pushed into the corner in favour of other buzzwords like policies, architectural design or urban regeneration. Too many coincidences? It was nothing more than a follow-up to the Chilean repression and the Chicago Boys theories and an anticipation of neo-liberalism, with the arrival of Reagan, Thatcher and Berlusconi.

- **Reaffirmation of land use planning as a local administrative technique:** land use planning is out of control. The predominant characteristics are abandonment of general and shared strategies and, almost consequently, lack of any protocol for analysis and assessment, legislative specificity and weakness, heterogeneity of regional and local applications and exasperated competition to attract investors. No authorities regulate the value and price of land and housing that fluctuate arbitrarily in a state of masked oligopoly. Analyses of shortages of social services and settlements, or strategic environmental assessment and environmental impact assessment, or analyses of carrying capacity, urban metabolism, ecological footprints and environmental impacts, become chapters of stories without a plot. Without quantitative analysis, theory can only be based on examples without a general value.

2. The second constant is the hegemony of local physical planning. Territories and the environment are fragmented by localisms in the same way that urban knowledge is fragmented. Myopic vision tends to reject long-term strategies taken at a higher level and consider them as interferences, thereupon appealing to principles of subsidiarity to approve piece-meal urban regeneration. There is only a hint at governance; everything is decided day by day in a political arena where everyone wants to win. Well-being is confused with increases in house and land prices, although the financial interests in urban transformations are often not local ones. Grassroots participation could express citizens’ interests, but it is weakened by consultative assemblies. Without real political will, sustainable development is nothing but a chimera.

3. The third constant is the hegemony of private interests guiding local actions. The territorial economy discards social and environmental costs in favour of profitability and appropriates common and public goods. Ground rents and private accumulation processes become the drivers of development, with the consent of smallholders. The ‘differential rent II’ described by Marx (a minimum of investment to maximise profits) attracts international investors. The greatest political and technical performance is to build cities in the desert and declare their sustainability.

Land use planning plays a central role in the social and productive system; without it (more or less concealed among the functions of the state) the economic and financial system cannot develop. As in neo-liberalism, it is necessary to conceal its essence, transmute participation, democracy and freedom on the land into icons without substance. It is vital for those who want to understand the sense of the rhythms of life to reflect critically to defend social liberties and to fight for social emancipation: we have to uncover the essence of the discipline. We can only achieve scientific robustness by overcoming these limits with new cognitive models, not with a mixture of architecture and administrative techniques. We have to re-establish the discipline!

Only too rarely do we speak of planning as if it were a normal science; few want to frame it in a broader context. Most people easily forget that cities and their inhabitants are the drivers of global social and environmental changes. They are ‘mega-machines’ that can produce increasingly more and faster by means of technological acceleration. On the other hand, we must remember that cities are the place of politics and participation, they are catalysts of revolutionary
ideas and incubators of emancipation, moulding social identities, giving hospitality, showing
civil magnificence in public spaces, hospitals, schools. This contradiction in terms contains the
dialectical spring-loaded by command and control, and by acceptance and solidarity. Which
soul will prevail? Despite the incredible, belligerent human diversity that unleashes wars to seize
resources, only ‘cities of meekness’ (Bobbio 1995) will dissolve conflicts and find a new alliance
with nature and humankind in its wholeness: the construction of a city is primarily an educa-
tion in citizenship.

Theories cannot be built without science: this is our problem. We cannot understand the
changes that cities are causing to the biosphere without science and theories. Both professional
and theoretical planners console themselves by saying: ‘Artificial land covered by settlements,
urban parks and infrastructure only amounts to 0.6 per cent of total land, so it is impossible for
it to be responsible for global changes’. Sometimes, they cynically affirm that we should trust in
the market, as if we had not already paid enough for the failures accumulated by voracious inves-
tors and economists, who are so confident in an invisible hand. The feeling is that neo-liberalist
craving has turned water, air and soil into heretical subjects, while I need to focus my teaching
on these themes: am I a heretic? Politicians do not comprehend these facts when they transform
local power into absolute power with the sole mission to construct great cities, faster and faster.

It is impossible to assess impacts without well-defined quantities, measurements with appro-
priate protocols, or reliable variables of control. Ecology is necessary to fight disinformation and
create awareness in societies that can propose and develop national objectives to give coherence
to regional and local planning with a view to environmental protection. What will happen in
2050 when the world’s population will probably reach 9 billion, or in 2100 when the global
average temperature will rise by 2 centigrade degrees per year? Cities are not mega-machines
but living systems which continuously develop new social and environmental characteristics. A
mega-machine is controlled mechanically, while a socio-ecological system requires all its mem-
bers to participate pro-actively to achieve mutual interests: this is not a marginal difference. We
are simultaneously the sources and the victims of global changes: how can we create emergent
properties in all societies that could reduce our environmental impacts? Can we govern these
emergent properties without re-discussing urban planning?

While Colin Clark was convinced that the Earth could feed 47 billion people (Clark 1968:
153), Albert Allen Bartlett lectured on the growth of bacteria confined in the narrow space of
a bottle (Bartlett n.d.): the bacterial population doubled every minute, but two minutes before
filling the bottle, they only occupied one quarter of it and still believed in an immense space.
They were unable to understand. What policies could they think of, poor bacteria? Wars? The
serious, current, global question is implicit in the interdependence of social inequalities, demo-
graphic growth, consumption of resources, critical factors and metastable equilibrium of the
biosphere.

Political will and complexity

Complexity is one of the characteristics of systems. It is revealed when properties emerge that
are not present in single elements. We cannot grasp the complexity of the biosphere if we are not
willing to see the world as an interaction of biotic and abiotic subsystems that interact in unfore-
seeable ways. Politicians cannot ignore the warning about the complexity of biological systems:

Instead of a construct in which the present implies the future, we are going towards a world
in which the future is open; and time is a construct in which we can all take part.

(Nicolis and Prigogine 1989: 3)
We can and we must take heed!

The increase in land use transformations and consumptions induces cumulative effects that are quite different from their simple addition, because they are new, systemic and unpredictable. Limiting factors for mankind could not only be population growth, food and fuel, but an alteration in the biosphere that would create a different state of metastable equilibrium, a hostile environment for human life equipped with its own resilience. Precisely for this reason, some scientists have begun to investigate the biosphere, to identify the most significant global and local processes that are capable of interacting to the point of forcing the Holocene era out of its equilibrium: this is the known hypothesis of Planetary Boundaries (Steffen et al. 2015). Their main aim is to identify the quantitative limits of human activities. However, I think that the link between land use and other processes is underestimated and that the real limiting factor will be the political capability for cooperation among nations in a wide governance with the manufacturing and trade sectors.

Reductionism has accustomed us to simplify, to avoid the complexities of intertwining social and environmental problems. We must reflect on the territorial dimension of social and environmental issues to give new analytical and operational capabilities to politics and planning. The role of planning on the limits can upset the biotic and abiotic union, between societies and environment. This is what makes it necessary and urgent to reprogramme our minds, so as not to become victims of fascinating but deceptive appearances: a city is not an architectural problem nor a quasi-artistic creation; a landscape is not an aesthetic matter.

I felt the need to completely revise my text and call for a new reading of history and the present time, for a new role for politics and for establishing an independent, open, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary science (Marescotti 2008). Looking back, I reread Lefebvre’s political project and realised that we have followed a similar itinerary, albeit by different roads (see Leary-Owhin in Part 1 on Lefebvre’s project):

This book has been informed from beginning to end by a project, though this may at times have been discernible only by reading between the lines. I refer to the project of a different society, a different mode of production, where social practice would be governed by different conceptual determinations.

(Lefebvre 1991: 419)

and the last sentence:

I speak of an orientation advisedly. We are concerned with nothing more and nothing less than that. We are concerned with what might be called a ‘sense’: an organ that perceives, a direction that may be conceived, and a directly lived movement progressing towards the horizon. And we are concerned with nothing that even remotely resembles a system.

(Lefebvre 1991: 423)

Procedures should be supported by theoretically robust instruments to strengthen the scientific structure of the discipline, but it is also necessary to link these tools with political choices in a common strategy. We must move away from single cases, however important they may be, to strategies shared by all urban regions. The objective to aim for is the adoption of social and environmental standards: the former to promote a just society with services and infrastructures, the places in which we can build our identities and represent ourselves; the latter to harmonise strategies towards the general objective of caring for the Earth. We must be conscious of biospheric limits and actualise Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address (1864). We must convey his message to
all human beings, the elderly, adults and children, all over the Earth, because their different ages are emblematic of past and future generations. We must fight to give this planet a new life of freedom, so that the idea of a government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from this Earth. It is both a political and a scientific issue.

Conclusions

I have discussed these subjects: (1) the future of cities in planetary systems based on a standardising model, (2) the need to live on Earth peacefully, (3) the reductionism of urban planning, (4) the limits of the biosphere’s metastable equilibrium, (5) the need for scientific independence in urban planning and political commitment.

My interest has moved from the physical city to global urbanisation, to earth sciences and social sciences, from analysis, to the need to share definitions and measuring protocols to verify or refute hypotheses regarding environmental impacts. Above all, I feel the need to strongly argue for political action, however compromised it may seem, because I believe that maturity in an independent discipline equipped with resources and laboratories to study environmental and social dynamics is essentially a political issue. I also feel that schools of all kinds and levels should be involved in this project and foster an education in citizenship. It will only be possible to involve the population in an urban planning which is aware of profound, dramatic ecological interactions if we overcome the bipolar model of the opposition between state and citizens.

Although my path was independent from Lefebvre’s studies, many echoes do rebound: analysis of the rhythms, of social imbalances and environmental impacts on a planetary scale. The right to the city expands to the right to live peacefully on Earth. The city of meekness is the city of freedom, equality and solidarity. This is my tribute to Lefebvre’s work.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Matina Kousidi for translating the first version and Jacqueline C. Ryder for the final English editing.

References