

## URBAN BEINGS OR CITY DWELLERS? THE COMPLEMENTARY CONCEPTS OF 'URBAN' AND 'CITY'

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### Abstract

This paper discusses, essayistically, the concepts of urban and city. It starts with the acceptance that conceptualizing things is not an easy task. On the contrary, it is full of complexities, intricate approaches and calls for the consideration of a historical account on the epistemology of space and urban, and of the idea of cities as artefacts. Despite being closely connected, it is certain that urban and city represent different phenomena. On the one hand, through the revisiting of classic theorists such as Lefebvre, Mumford, Harvey and others, we point out to the idea of urban as something intangible, or a way of life that reflects modern societies. The idea that the world is increasingly urbanized is in fact commonsense to many scientific fields since the Industrial Revolution. On the other hand, we argue that city is a material object, territorial bound, represented by the concentration of buildings, roads, public and private spaces, people, altogether concentrated in the least possible area. This justifies the title of this paper: just as we cannot deny that we organize ourselves and our spaces as if we were all urban beings, this condition does not necessarily imply that we are all city dwellers. Yet, the physical and ontological ties of these two concepts tend to become increasingly complex and blurred if one considers important technological developments (in recent years, mostly information and communication technologies), which tend to reduce the importance of physical boundaries and the friction of distance, making citizens more global than local. Thus in this context, we can ask if there is any reason to define the physical limits of a city? If we have our communication capabilities expanded beyond the immediate territories that define our living spaces, what are the real limits and boundaries of our cities? In this article, we try and shed some light to the relationships between the complementary ideas of urban and city vis-à-vis their theoretical differences and similarities in past and present days.

**Keywords:** urban, city, concepts.

### Urbanities and citizens: the theoretical construction of a concept

The theoretical construction of a concept is considered one of the most difficult tasks in social sciences and, perhaps because of that, scientists largely take for granted

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the ontological discussions of their specific subjects. In fact, the construction of a common vocabulary – which is absolutely necessary to any scientific discussion – is behind the importance we must give to the construction of a concept itself.

Deleuze and Guattari (1994) argue that there are no “easy concepts” since they result from a historical process, made of complex relations among a number of social actors and an intricate relationship with many other concepts. In fact, for these authors, every concept result from a previous set of ideas, which makes this theoretical construction an endless spiral of dialectic associations between established concepts and ideas to be. Although the context considered by Deleuze and Guattari is philosophically constituted and allows us to justify broader concepts they cannot be misunderstood with general ideas or personal judgments.

Many dictionaries simply state that concept in philosophy is the mental, abstract and general representation of a certain object or a certain reality. Seen in this way, we may come to the conclusion that we are somewhat free to understand things the way we think is the most appropriate for every different and particular situation. This approach may be not absolutely wrong. In fact, the very process of understanding something and expressing to it others is a complex and long process. This route starts with the so called perception of things such as natural facts that provide us some information. But, despite the fact that perception may differ according to different socio-cultural groups and backgrounds, there is a biological connection that may transform them in universal.

Perception - or notion - generates the second process that is the one of the problematization, according to different characteristics of various cultural groups: the world is what I see and then I see it! That is the concept of the world *I* may have.

When people are asked to apprehend some notion, they often complain that they do not know what they have to think. But the fact is that in a notion there is nothing further to be thought than the notion itself. (Hegel in Blunden, A.1997)

If we bring this ontological discussion to the core of this paper, we may consider that, although it is acceptable that the concepts of city and urban may vary according to distinct cultural perspectives, their definition should be precise, commonsense and universal. Due to the complexity of such phenomena (urban and city) extremely dependent on local, regional and temporal aspects, this article is cautiously driven by the intention of conceptual contextualization rather than any precise terminological definition.

And so, having this intention in mind, we may wonder how can we think through the theoretical differences between the concepts of city and urban. Most of the time, these two words are used as if they were exactly the same thing, with no relational changes throughout history. First, they are different because they correspond to different processes, despite the fact that they are intrinsically connected. Second, the ideas that explain these two concepts also vary over time and history. For instance, in the past, city was characterized by a more compact and concentrated kind of settlement, usually physically isolated from its neighbouring cities; nowadays, it is much more complex to think about city limits and connections with its surroundings. Medieval, modern and even industrial cities differentiate from their rural surroundings much more than our contemporary city does: a distinction blurred along centuries. The relation of a city with territories outside its boundaries (legally defined as urban perimeter) may help us build the conceptual idea of a city. We can also think of cities as the concrete and physical materialization of some parts of an urban culture or urban

society. This is, in fact, one of the parameter used in this article to conceptualize city and urban.

At the same time, the notion of space is constantly being challenged throughout history. It has already crossed the frontiers of a physical territory by considering space as a social by-product. Moreover, this notion now implies the incorporation of the complexity of virtual, remote and distant interactions along.

Some questions are posed as starting points to our discussions: How to define, with all the desirable and necessary precision and accuracy, the words city (not to mention town, village or urban settlement) and urban considering geographical and historical changes? How to use the same words for processes that are under constant transformation, from the Greek polis, to the Roman Civitas and Urb, to the industrial city of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and finally to an urbanized world (Lefebvre, 1991)? It seems obvious that naming such different ways of occupying a space and building societal relations under the same canopy is in fact inappropriate.

### **'City' and 'urban'**

Having agreed that city and urban not only evolve along time but that they really are different phenomena, next step in this discussion is to determine what makes them different, despite the long observed connectivity. Among many differences, we can simplistically say that the former can be defined in terms of a territory, defined by the land it occupies – although we know that contiguity and territoriality can be questioned as determinants to place-bound in these days of information and communication technologies (we will return to this later). Meanwhile, territorial boundaries do not help to understand the latter, which is to say that it is impossible to physically define or delimit what an urban territory truly is.

Thus, for those who deal with these two words, urban and city, what is the most appropriate way - avoiding the adjective "correct" - of conceptualizing them? First, as said before, city has evolved according to historical moments and to changes in the way humans relate to each others and to their surrounding environments. Second, urban is invisible, intangible and immeasurable. Tentativeness to establish what is and what is not urban are in fact becoming very difficult in a world that has long started a process of becoming entirely urbanized. If everything is urban, what is in fact the purpose of defining it? The need to define or to conceptualize something is explained by the feeling that it differs from something else. Even though it seems to be a consensus that contemporary society is an urban society, and that this has been the case since the Industrial Revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lefebvre, 1991), it is still important to clarify the definition of what urban means after all. Everything and everywhere seems to be related to urban, but urban is not everything and not everywhere is urbanized.

In the book *The Urban Revolution*, and aware of a worldwide broad urbanization process since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Lefebvre (1999) builds the idea that urban and city do not definitely serve to conceptualize the same thing. To him, and this seems to be agreed by many other authors, *urban* is a set of transformations that characterizes contemporary society mostly due to demographic growth, concentration and industrialization, a way of life of modern societies. It is, thus, something intangible and subject to different scales (more or less urban), with much room for personal, historical, ideological, comprehension, but at the same time generally observed (all over the

world), consistent (it allows no doubt about its existence) and contemporary (serving to making our present society different from the previous ones).

On the other hand, *city* is a tangible and concrete object, territorially delimited, the one that can be seen through the concentration of buildings, roads, public and private spaces, people, conflicts, and common efforts, altogether in the minimum possible concentrated area. In an attempt to update Lefebvre's definition, it is important to stress, though, that the differences between urban and city do not rely exclusively on the limits defined by territorial boundaries. City itself is becoming something different to what we classically came to know as urban agglomerations. In this respect, one can, figuratively, say that city, as a concept, is always pursuing urban, always trying to equal the idea of urban. Even though it is quite possible they will never be the same. In other words, and simplistically, we can define urban as a particular set of societal arrangements linked to the industrial and post-industrial means of production, while city is the historical possible materialization of the urban phenomenon, and urbanization is the spatial process that makes possible this materialization of urban into cities.

If Lefebvre is largely quoted in the conceptual discussion on cities and urban he may also be questioned in his accuracy to distinguish them. Healey (2002), for example, when discussing the concept of city, adopts a more doubtful approach, both in terms of precise boundaries and concrete appearance. "Where is the city? Where are its cores and boundaries? ... How can we grasp what a city is and could be? (Healey, 2002: 1779). In fact, rather than conceptualizing city, as in Lefebvre's approach, Patsy Healey considers it in a more fractal way, taking into consideration the diverse interpretations made by different actors who live, build and use cities. Thus, she considers the "imaginative", socially constructed concepts of city, those that are "locked into cultural inheritances and institutional practices." (Healey, 2002: 1777). By recognizing her doubts, adopting multiple (or imaginative) concepts for one single subject (the city), she returns to the always present consideration of the material/concrete characteristic of a city: "Cities are not just material artefacts, although we experience the materiality of urban life ... what is city lies beyond these specific existences and materialities, although as conceived, cities are full of people, technologies and power relations. But yet, cities do exist and have a material effects." (Healey, 2002: 1783).

Besides the well known insights brought by Lefebvre (1999) on the distinction of the concepts discussed here, two other authors may help in such conceptual construction: Leonardo Benevolo and Lewis Mumford.

Leonardo Benevolo (1984), when describing the city in history, establishes a difference between the city that existed before the Industrial Revolution and the one that is shaped according to this new economic determination. If cities did exist before the industrialization, from this moment on they deeply changed its relation with their regions. If regions had long defined and sustained cities, after socioeconomic transformations brought by the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, regions started to depend on cities to survive and be shaped by them. At this point the understanding of what a city and the space around it were had to be deeply reviewed. Lewis Mumford (1961), in a very similar way, pedagogically depicted the history of cities as something that originally was a *world* to a situation of a world that is a *city*. These two examples confirm how city can, and should, be seen differently according to societal changes; forcing us to conceptualize it differently, too; along time and geographically. If we agree with Mumford in his assertion that the city was once a world, due to the very restricted view our ancestors towards their location in the universe, Lefebvre's idea would

hardly make sense: it could hardly transform itself into an entire city, but, yes, in an entire urbanized world. There is no doubt about Mumford's figurative way of expressing himself, but if we insist on the search of having clearer concepts of city and urban, this assertion goes against the hypothesis adopted in this article: we may be all urban but we do not all live in cities.

McLuhan (1962) now stressing the importance of communication, rather than the visible sprawls (physical objects) as Mumford had previously presented, in a very similar way, popularizes the idea of a "global village" (McLuhan, 1962; McLuhan, 1964). In this case, despite criticisms on the fact that McLuhan's ideas are frequently taken as a cliché (see Williams, 1967; Williams, 1974 and Willmott, 1996, who refer to McLuhan as a technological determinist), his analysis does not contradict the idea of having cities in an entire urbanized world: on the contrary, this author reinforces this idea by emphasizing the importance of communication and consequently reviewing the way boundaries were considered so far.

In a first moment, and for a long period in history, city could be conceptualized as the physical but partial representation of society. This representation, in fact, was an important tool to understand different societies, who built and occupied the land which served as the basis for their historical and cultural development. Once industrialization outbreaks and urbanization mushrooms everywhere to become a universal phenomenon, cities may no longer be taken as a perfect and sole reflection of the societies who live in their no longer clear boundaries. According to Benevolo (1984) again, cities are an instrument to simply maintain diverse socioeconomic interests and to consolidate a hierarchy long structured.

Despite the fact that many authors do recognize the difference between what is built and what is not, what is concrete and what is not, the use of the proper word to name each one of such possibilities may disagree, blurring what at first sight might seem clear. Rob Krier, for example reveals a concern in differentiate "geometrically bounded" spaces which could certainly be understood as man-modified and occupied spaces, from empty spaces but name them in a specific way.

If we wish to clarify the concept of urban space without imposing aesthetic criteria, we are compelled to designate all types of space between buildings in towns and other localities as urban space. This space is geometrically bounded by a variety of elevations. It is only the clear legibility of its geometrical aesthetic qualities which allows us consciously to perceive external space as urban space. (*Krier, 1975: 1*)

Most of the time, for administrative, fiscal and political reasons, it is still important to define urban or cities according to more precise boundaries, and most of the time not differentiating the two concepts. For these purposes, what is possible to detect is just a territory named urban that contains a city; spaces not occupied but still inside such urban area are that to be preferentially developed, densified with tertiary activities. According to this approach, parameters to define urban territories vary from country to country. Generally speaking the idea of a minimum total population living next to each other and developing intense connectivity are the most common parameters to be found. Minimum of total population and vicinity are added to another mandatory characteristic: the existence of economic activities based on industry, commerce and services. In fact, historical specificities, geographical characteristics and conceptual discrepancies may easily give room to a more pragmatic determination in order to support fiscal, technical and administrative decisions such as permission to develop new areas, cost parameters to transportation system, availability of infrastructure and services. David Oates (2006) when describing his concerns about

the increasing occupation of rural areas in Portland with development projects, densifying natural landscapes clearly, distinguishes what lies on one side or another of a legally determined “urban perimeter”.

The UGB [Urban Growth Boundary] is a limit. And it is hated, in many quarters. It works by limiting behaviours: no subdivisions on the outside please; no tenfold profits. And on the inside: all kinds of rules. Like, 50 percent of all residential zoning must require multi-family apartments or condos, to sustain affordable housing. Like, designs, lot sizes, curbs, sidewalks (etc. etc.) must all be approved. (Oates, 2006: 55)

As seen from above, demographic concentration, separation of activities and amount of rules on the way space can be used and transformed are in fact the phenomena to differentiate urban from what is not urban, in this case, urban from rural. Again, delimitation is not to be vague, but quite the contrary, it must adopt physical limits in order to clarify legal differentiations.

General sense, however, takes the differentiation of activities as the most decisive phenomenon to distinguish urban (and city) from a rural area. In fact, activities based on the exploitation of natural resources, such as agriculture or minerary developments are always banned from what is to be defined as urban.

The urban-rural classification of population in internationally published statistics follows the national census definition, which differs from one country or area to another. National definitions are usually based on criteria that may include any of the following: size of population in a locality, population density, distance between built-up areas, predominant type of economic activity, legal or administrative boundaries and urban characteristics, such as specific services and facilities”. (United Nations, 2006)

According to this UN report, that somewhat does not consider recent transformations in the productive rural sector and its intricacies with commercial, industrial and financial sectors, the precise definition of what urban territories are is a fundamental reference in its world, regional and country by country statistics. To do so, referential documents like this must consider minimum agglomeration between 2000 and 5000 inhabitants and a general pattern for people working in manufacturing, services and commerce activities or a limit for those working in the primary sector. Really, what is allowed to be diffuse, contextualized, and fractalized in common sense views, does not fit in fiscal, ordenative and statistic activities.

## **New challenges to old paradigms**

In this conceptual and imaginary pursuit, the possibility of communicating with virtually anywhere in the world, overcoming the friction of distance for economic transactions and human interactions, poses a powerful challenge to the comprehension of space and its relation with time, and therefore, to the very comprehension of city and urban as we currently understand them. According to Skeates (1997), paradigms of the organization of space and territory are ‘under threat’. Yet according to him, many of the terms which refer to space are being misused.

We are beginning to understand that there has been a shift, a break with the past that means that we can no longer use the term ‘city’ in the way that it has been used to describe an entity which, however big and bloated, is still recognisable as a limited and bounded structure which occupies a specific space. (Skeates, 1997: 6)

Many of the previous theories of urban studies rely on notions of space and time strongly dependent on physical distances. There are still references to distance as

a strict space and time condition when it is said, for instance, that Boston is at four hours' drive from New York City. Yet catching a bus from NYC to Boston would entail a different way of referring to the 'distance'.

However, what if there is no need to travel from one place to another - for actually 'being there'? What if it is possible to do those things in London in a matter of minutes or seconds without physically leaving Paris? This is what, according to some commentators, is happening with distance (see for example Skeates, 1997; Crang, 2000; Ezechieli, 1998; May, 1998; Sikiaridi and Vogelaar, 2000; and Baker, 1999). Harvey (1989) calls this phenomenon 'space-time compression', where distance is said to be increasingly shrinking by the development of more efficient technologies of communication. This immediately affects perceptions and concepts of space and time, as the two start to converge into one single entity:

Traditionally architecture was place-bound, linked to a condition of experience. Today, mediated environments challenge the givens of classical time, the time of experience [...] Architecture can no longer be bound by the static conditions of space and place, here and there. (Peter Eisenman, 1991 quoted by Crang, 2000: 303)

The organization of urban space is directly affected by the changes in distances. Decentralization and centralization are the most obvious effects, and they usually happen at the same time. This is commonly interpreted as a sign that the shifts provoked by the development of information and communication technology do not replace but rather complement physical urban life.

The characterization of the urban process developed in a specific society does influence the way city is built, used, destroyed, sold and bought. Furthermore, both urban and city are spatial concepts and have space as their very essence. Space cannot be analyzed or even understood just as a physical entity, separated from time and, consequently, separated from social aspects of particular communities or societies. Many scholars have been working on this type of 'unitary space' where there is no separation between physical, mental and social elements of space (Lefebvre, 1991). As mentioned above, apart from being socially and territorially-dependent, the production of space has also been associated with the shrinking of distance. In general the idea of an interdependent and dialectic space made of inseparable complex structures of objects and actions, of territory and society (Santos 1994) has become more and more accepted.<sup>1</sup>

This is the relation that makes urban and city as concepts closely connected, but not only in a cause-effect process. The relation is really much more complex: if urban life with all its social relations, political structures, economic profile, financial burdens and cultural desires may result, among other things, in the concrete way of living together, the contrary is also true. Cities in fact may foster, deteriorate, destroy and create new societal forms. This is why one can join Santos and Lefebvre in saying that space, society, urban and city are all interdependent concepts, influenced by intrinsic and dialectic processes of historically constructed inter-relations between humans themselves and their surrounding environments.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the extensive work of Milton Santos is not widely known in the Anglo-Saxon world, his ideas about space broadly incorporate and integrate theories from others scholars such as David Harvey, Henry Lefebvre, Gottfried Leibniz, and others.

## Beyond bounded space and infinite urbanization

Scholars, researchers and professionals of space like the architects Marcos Novak and Lebbeus Woods are quoted by Crang (2000) as formulators of new ideas of cities, or even new notions of architecture and urbanism. Novak, for example, coined the terms 'liquid architecture' and 'transarchitecture' to explain the complex relations between the physical space and networks of interactions in cyberspace:

The architect Marcos Novak offers one way of thinking through these issues in his projects to create, first, a liquid architecture of cyberspace, which he suggests offers an 'augmented space', that is thinking through what worlds of information might be shaped like, and, second, a 'transarchitecture' of their intersection with material world [...] Novak suggests that both mean redefining the urban field by challenging three deeply embedded assumptions of urban studies. First, that space is three-dimensional and shared between actors. Second, space is either solid or void. And, third, you can only be in one place at one time. (Crang, 2000: 306-7)

Woods is referred to by Crang (2000) as someone whose work supports the existence of a parallel city, or even parallel cities, called 'centri-cities'. Centri-cities would be made of complex interactions and differences. As Crang puts it:

From the mid-1980s he [Lebbeus Woods] produced the idea of 'centri-cities', formed of overlapping interference wave patterns expressing life in a multipolar urban city. Urban multiplicity stands in opposition to the classical city – where the acropolis represented the single centre of authority that worked hierarchically through the polis [...] Instead of utopian monologue producing the hierarchical city (organized around the one principle) he looks for a heterarchical city of dialogue that is necessarily incomplete and incoherent. (Crang, 2000: 310)

There are other innovative ideas in which cities are challenged by assumptions that consider urban space to be completely unbounded and aterritorial, stimulating new ways to interpret and act upon the city, as well as thinking about the idea of urban. Some commentators defend the idea of a networked city (Batten, 1995; Drewe, 2000; Townsend, 2003) as an evolution of the concept of the polycentric city – which is in turn already an alternative to Christaller's 'central place' theory, currently mostly considered a very reductionist approach. According to this idea, 'dealing with networks as central concepts means dealing with mesh or web, sectoral topological subdivision, attraction, contact, orientation, territorial dynamic and hierarchy related to a network' (Drewe, 2000: 16).

Rather than trying to establish a single name or concept for the contemporary city, it is important to recognize that 1. it is a fractal object with increasing challenges to conceptualization efforts; and 2. that new elements play now an important role in the configuration of urban space. Yet, in order to have the proper conditions to act upon such space, we need to understand the new rules, the new elements, and the nature of the contemporary city. Batten (1995) argues that the characteristics of the networked city are far more pervasive than the ones of Christaller's central place theory. He argues that although 'some larger cities possess both network and central place characteristics, it is the smaller network cities that have counteracted the central place trend towards primacy and contributed to the size-neutrality or urban growth' (Batten, 1995: 320).

Yet in this sense, urban is described by commentators like Skeates (1997) as something that vividly consumes or engulfs the classical 'city' and 'country' altogether – to which we would also add cyberspace and the virtual city. This makes it impossible to define frontiers and boundaries in the contemporary city. Skeates abandons the idea

of cities and maintains that we are left with something much more complex, or a 'devouring monster'. Quoting Dejan Sudjic's idea of 'urban soup' to describe this devouring monster, he emphasizes the 'space consuming' nature of infinite urbanization.

It is important to notice that, although he abandons the notion of cities as we currently are used to, Skeates does not suggest the end or death of cities and urban life. On the contrary, he reinforces such things by creating an extended notion of the urban, accepting Lefebvre's idea of a urban society.

He also defends the idea of an 'artificialized nature' as everything and everywhere is potentially reachable by humans through new technologies. This is very similar to what Santos (1994) says about the whole space which he calls the 'technical-scientific-informational milieu', where technology, science and information are totally embedded in space, and spread across the territory, 'artificializing' nature.

The so-called postmodern city represents a huge leap away from any referent that can anchor that meaning outside of itself. All space succumbs to the logic of the constructed, the artificial and the mythologized which attempts to deny the possibility of there being any 'real' conditions of urban existence underneath the layers of hyperreality. (Skeates, 1997: 12)

Following these ideas, due to new technologies, everything now is potentially part of a complex space of social interactions, without boundaries and within the context of highly evolved world relations of production, distribution and consumption. Painter (2001) also draws attention to an aggressive process of physical and virtual urbanization that he calls the limitless city, an intricate network of networks and relations that makes urbanity a complex concept, untied from traditional notions of territory. This is also related to what we mentioned above as a figurative expression of the concept of city pursuing or trying to overlap the concept of urban, in an infinite run. In other words, the city is always trying to become the exact expression of urban, its own reflection. But we know that no matter how spread, splintered or unbounded cities are, they will never coincide to what Lefebvre calls urban. The 'aterritorial city', though, according to Painter, is helping to break hierarchical spatial relations like the 'tyranny of scale':

The assumption that social and political life is organized into a nested hierarchy of spatial scales ('local', 'national', 'global') each of which involves a relatively self-contained set of social phenomena and governance structures, albeit with important relations between them. (Painter, 2001: 35)

It is clear that new paradigms of urban space and geographic territorial organization are emerging in the same proportion as the new concepts of space and time (the former being in fact a consequence of the reformulation of the latter), city and urban. These paradoxical spatial behaviors of concentration and decentralization reveal the direction of new patterns of urban occupation, where all the aspects involved in these interrelated processes are together replacing the old notions of a linear, rational and bounded space, and so, renovating once again precise notions of city and urban.

## Conclusions

By taking *city* and *urban* as different concepts, while also admitting that they influence each other, may help overcome two common mistakes in dealing with urban or regional planning. First, if not taken as simplified objects that can be (re)defined by the interest of the town planner's will, public policies tend to be more precise and space concerned. Second, even accepting the arrogant idea that it is possible to

transform societal forms by means of physical interventions in our cities (partly justifying “acts of god” played by planners and architects), it is still absolutely necessary to recognize that, on the other way round, society influences our cities. In other words, it is necessary to recognize that urban spaces and urban way of life do - and obviously - influence cities. Whatever simple this mutual and dialectic influence may seem, its understanding or clear assumption would help us, for instance, in developing new areas, revitalizing degraded ones, and providing or proposing green spaces and green belts.

At the end of this article, taking the challenge of establishing conceptual specificities for “urban” and “city” seems even more contradictory due to their already known intricacy. By considering historical and geographical phenomena this conceptual purpose confirms, again, a cumulative process of overlapping understandings. By juxtaposing different legal, planning and theoretical views, this very same purpose reveals a desire for precise clarification versus a more nebulous or vague understanding. By updating the discussion according to novelties brought by the attenuation given to physical distance, the increasing importance of digital communications and the recognized relevance of a more networked and intense matrix of societal relations, “urban” and “city” concepts appear to deserve an entire review or even a multiple understanding in order to apprehend their recent accumulated meanings.

This article might disappoint those who expected a definite concept for the objects discussed here, especially in its conclusions. For the authors, though, it was clear from the very beginning of this discussion, that the endeavour would simply result in more complex conceptual layers added to the long debate about the phenomena of urban and city. The lack of such conclusive concepts may, then, be explained by the complexity, the mutual influence and the temporal adjustments urban and city have been submitted to since they exist as well as since they formally emerged in social science discussions.

Rather than trying to establish a single word or concept for the contemporary city, we came to the conclusion that new elements play now an important role in the configuration of urban space. In order to have the proper conditions to act upon such space, we need to understand the new rules, the new elements, and the nature of the contemporary city. It is in fact an intricate exercise to understand such a complex phenomena. The more recent aggregation of characteristic aspects of the city and of the urban world such as the generalized availability of technology, telecommunications, and information - to name some - , confirms the need of new and more fractal concepts.

We started this short article, named *Urban Beings or City Dwellers?*, with a clear idea that urban and city were different concepts. Now we end it reiterating this idea. Behind this title there was an intention to explain that *cities* were, much more than today, boundary defined phenomena. At the same time, we consider that *urban* has unclear delimitations. Current societal changes, most of them influenced or created by technological novelties, have put space, territory and physical distance (traditional and important factors to define urban and city) under decisive threat. This situation forces us to review once more the two concepts discussed here. If distance and time were in fact shortened at a universal level, conceptual differences as these showed here may no longer be important. Further essays may be named differently. In a short term perspective, discussion would come under a title expressing the dual possibility of *To*

*Be or Not Be a City, but mostly certainly Urban!* In a long term perspective, our article may be apologetically titled *We are all certainly urban and we all live in a City!*

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