



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: A  
ARTS & HUMANITIES - PSYCHOLOGY  
Volume 22 Issue 3 Version 1.0 Year 2022  
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal  
Publisher: Global Journals  
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

## Urban Regeneration and Human Rehabilitation - Thriven by Fourth Nature

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*Introduction-* It is nowadays quite usual to hear the affirmation 'everything is connected' and this banalization makes us sometimes not take its real importance into account. We live in an intrinsically complex living world. Everything breathes, everything moves, everything dances. What about being able to hear the same music? Once we allow our senses to perceive our surroundings, a previous unknown dimension of life opens for us. Andreas Weber (2016) says that "*only in the mirror of other life can we understand our own lives. Only in the eyes of the other we become ourselves*". This reinforces the Fourth Nature Concept: that talks about the reciprocity existing in the relation man/Nature through a new consciousness (PROCHNOW, 2020).

Once we bring Nature back to our every day lives, we will be able to see ourselves as Nature again. Amerindian people do not have in their language a specific term to define "Nature", they conceive reality as a continuum, where humanity, animals, plants and stars are connected and have responsibilities to creating and recreating life. In the 3rd Millennium, it will be fundamental to restore this idea, concerning our survival on this planet, as well as its continuity.

*GJHSS-A Classification: DDC Code: 616.8106 LCC Code: RC388.5*



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## I. INTRODUCTION

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Once we bring Nature back to our everyday lives, we will be able to see ourselves as Nature again. Amerindian people do not have in their language a specific term to define "Nature", they conceive reality as a continuum, where humanity, animals, plants and stars are connected and have responsibilities to creating and recreating life. In the 3rd Millennium, it will be fundamental to restore this idea, concerning our survival on this planet, as well as its continuity. We must review what and how we build. Our everyday activities, as well as our houses, our settlements and our cities — of any size. Considering them all connected and as one form of Nature, not different from Nature. But *how*?

My research inquiries, like this one above for example, are mostly solved when I look for answers evoking very old concepts in balance with, let's say, very fresh ideas. This kind of correspondence ends up in a third view, normally intriguing. When thinking about how to treat, feel and build cities as one form of Nature, one of the seven basic laws of Nature seemed very appropriate - *polarity*: known as part of the Hermetic Principles - to configure an answer. Nature and cities are normally taken as opposites. This law says that everything in the world has two poles, its corresponding opposite, but they are in fact one only thing, identical in source but different in grade, different in intensities. For example: heat and cold, dark and light, love and hate... cities and Nature! It is only a question of grading both extremes - in mental or physical manifestation.

It is said also that there can be infinite grading in between the different poles. It is relevant to notice,

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however, that things belonging to different categories can not be modified in between them, only the ones that are in the same order. For example: dark can be changed into light, but fear can not be changed into cold, only into courage. Even more exciting: the law says that the extremes touch each other, the opposites have an inherent power that always searches for balance, all paradoxes can be reconciled. In this sense, we can start understanding cities and Nature as belonging to the same order, once we recognize two important facts: first of all, we humans are Nature, and second, we are the ones that transform Nature into our culture, into art, into architecture! Everything you see created, developed, designed or produced in the world before being materialized was in someone's mind. A chair, a glass, a book, a window, a building — all this is Nature transformed by us humans. Isn't it amazing?

In his book 'The Biology of Wonder', Andreas Weber says that life is feeling. So the challenge for living is to be able to feel amazed again, to be capable of understanding and balancing the poles - this is what is missing in our lives at most. Being animated means being governed by feeling and the desire to grow; animation is the biological power of self construction and continuity. This is the feeling we share with all creatures. The genuine experience of good and bad, the deep waves of misery and joy - but indeed, human consciousness often misses the point (WEBER, 2016, p. 68).

## II. TAKING CITIES AND NATURE AS MERELY OPPONENTS IS A FALSE ASSUMPTION

It is in our hands, literally, as humanity, to find the balance which is inherent in the polarity city/Nature. As living organisms, our cities of any size are in eternal metamorphosis, just like we are, as says Emanuele Coccia (another contemporary philosopher that inspires me hugely). We, as "thinkers" and designers of cities, shall understand the way this balance can be more easily and intelligently achieved. Allowing and enabling change. Not designing against Nature, as we normally see in nowadays projects, but allied to it. Once we have this balance in mind, and knowing that everything is alive and permanently changing, it is easier to understand how Nature's forces are highly intelligent and grand. And that we shall be smart enough to join these forces. This is what I call a *Genius Loci Approach*:



when we, architects and urban planners, see, understand and perceive the natural environment “spirit” which we are going to work with, using all our being and sensibilities but also with all technology available - and being visionaries. How can this happen? What is the ideal scenario we can have in mind? It is our responsibility making it possible for Nature to cohabit a space with our creations, turning it into a place — with meaning and purpose (PROCHNOW; CASTELLO, 2021).

We have the chance to make the balance between cities and Nature reachable — in all its nuances. In this way, it is possible to regenerate urban landscapes, healing places and therefore healing also human souls that inhabit these place, by making them connect again. We are already seeing many ways emerging, like urban farming, blue-green infrastructure design, green roofs and walls of many different kinds, that bring Nature back into cities, also using it in favor of urban processes. This is good, but we need more. We need to build communities in all its senses, respecting people and their need for social interaction and the environment, aiming for a whole well being, in a holistic way. By connecting people to other people, outsides and insides, private and public, built and natural, evolution and consciousness, the equation starts to stabilize.

### III. THIS IS WHAT THE FOURTH NATURE DOES: RECOVERS UNITY IN MULTIPLICITY

Our species is suffering from what Richard Louv (2011) calls NDD - Nature Deficit Disorder. Our disconnectedness from nature has a huge impact on our health and well-being. We are living sick in sick cities. It is very important to observe however, that *'health is not only the absence of disease or pain, it is also physical, emotional, mental, intellectual and spiritual capacity - in short, concerns the joy of being alive'* as Louv says. The Fourth Nature concept says this is an inherent capacity inside each one of us and Nature can spark it.

Science has some difficulties in describing the way we perceive Nature - because it is also about intuition and senses, not practical, not obvious and has no unified results. At all. This must be considered when we try to answer some questions that drive urban design challenges nowadays: which role can open spaces play in recovering public life? How can public spaces effectively contribute to making social interaction possible? How to reinvigorate cities' landscapes, mitigate climate problems and above all enhance life quality in urban scenarios? It seems that bringing Nature back as protagonist in urban design is already considered one of the most recurrent solutions, due to its effectiveness. Together with temporary and malleable

uses, the dynamics are prevailing over permanence and creativity is overcoming regulations. Creating and recreating places through interventions that can articulate public interactions with low cost greening actions create a positive impact on urban habitat. All these are possible features that somehow increase the connection of city dwellers with the natural world, with positive side effects in urban structures. In this sense, mutating strategies based on citizens as decision makers appear as solutions very well accepted, once they commute the most evident needs with different resources available in different places and time.

We humans are unique and each of us is a unity of sensations and backgrounds. The presence of Nature in cities is able to bring us back to a common base of principles, where we feel somehow equal and where we are back in the mood of letting ourselves enjoy our characteristics of not only humans but also social beings. This idea is brought about by the Fourth Nature concept, which envisions the evolution of our relation to the natural world through being conscious of its presence and of our own presence in the world. This can influence absolutely all our feelings and actions - and lead us to optimal outcomes based on consensus and aiming at the collective well-being - recovering uniqueness in multiplicity.

Urban planners are now seeking for continuity and compactness in cities - this is where Nature can enhance its presence and also the good results. Former 'empty spaces' can easily be changed into green spaces, being the turning point in urban regeneration processes. Being present in different scales and positions within the urban tissue, it can provide fluidity as well. Parks and smaller green areas can be connected through green streets, where not only trees but also rain gardens, edible gardens and planted balconies, adding value to the whole surroundings, spreading like a positive metastasis. When we promote this green presence and we will inhabit these places reinvigorated by nature's presence, we start feeling different and certainly better. It is more than just letting nature grow, it is about taking part in the decision of having nature again in our near and being conscious of its role in our existence. It's a reinvigorated sense of belonging that nurtures change.

It is proven that states of meditation, states of being connected to Nature, even by the simple fact of allowing it to amaze us, already provides our body and cells regeneration. Grounding for example, walking barefoot in grass or on earth, brings our inner system slowly into balance. Again, isn't it amazing? Let 's do it! Let's plan places where this is possible as part of our routine. Not as an exception.



We are part of a fascinating cosmos, in which there is already no doubt that a supreme intelligence coordinates and reorganizes the fluxus and all systems (KAKU, 1994). We just have to not disturb it, but comprehend it and connect to it. The way we have built our settlements must be reviewed urgently. And it can sometimes be more simple than we imagine. We are not talking about giving back technology or everything that is part of evolution, we just have to be aware that this is not enough. We are a perfect conjunction of matter and energy, and the vital energy evolution/perception/flow is what is lacking. The Nature Deficit Disorder studies summarizes all this and explains its consequences when it says that inspiration is another form of health. When we go to the woods knowing that our health will be better, when we have the chance to gaze at the sky and the birds that fly in the rain, the colors that spontaneously pop up, the benefits come in the form of physical, psychological and spiritual gains. We can feel a natural euphoria when we are taken by a sensation of light, of energy and a kind of revered admiration (LOUV, 2010). We find again the sense of humility. This is one of the most significant happenings for a heal to begin.

#### IV. WHAT CAME FIRST, OUR SICKNESS OR THE DISCONNECTION FROM NATURE?

Hard to explain. It is just essential to perceive that this negative spiral in which we are trapped must stop and reverse. The Fourth Nature concept sees this

as totally possible, once it is not opposing evolution, but reinforcing it - in an holistic way. Our civilization and culture is also part of the universe flow, that is why we are here, to experiment and discover new ways of not only surviving, but harmonic living and evolving, transforming, relating, learning. We are social beings, our identity and the recognition of the community are part of our well being, fundamental for feeling healthy. New ways of planning and designing cities, respecting Nature's existence will make it flourish and consequently we as part of it, will feel so much valuable too. We know how great it is when we are able to live and express ourselves with authenticity. So why don't we allow nature to do the same and lead us in this direction? The connection body/mind is something already very disclosed. The antidote for the NDD is a body/mind/nature connection, in other terms, I would say a body/mind/soul balance, once what makes us equal to Nature is the vital force that goes through us all and sustains life.

We relate to others and to the world through our sensitivity, we live under the perpetual influence of the sensitive. This becomes so obvious when we realize that our senses define our reality and bring meaning to our thoughts. All bodies can become a way to another form that exists out of them in so far as they can receive it, without resistance (COCCIA, 2010). This is also part of Fourth Nature essence, that thrives on bringing together urban regeneration and human rehabilitation. Nature that provokes us, to break up the resistance and the

distance, allowing ourselves to perceive, to feel, to receive its energy in all forms - other human presence,

plants, animals, art, culture, food, sun heat, sounds, voices, light, touch, smiles.



## V. SOME MOMENTARY CONCLUSIONS

A fresh start is not necessarily a new place, but it is ultimately a new mindset. Humanity is facing challenges upcoming from its own development, its own decisions about ways of living. We are here to learn, to experience, but it's about time to be aware of new steps, it's about time to create a new definition of mental health, based on environmental issues (ROSZAK in LOUV, 2010).

We humans, as culture creators, can make urban regeneration possible, coworking with nature. When we align with this intention, we realize something stunning: we are the solution, not the problem. For sure we learn in the process, but along its duration, we also profit by discovering new possibilities of life, new ways of becoming truly human again by getting connected to our inner power and purpose. While performing new visions to heal our cities, we will certainly match modes of healing ourselves. When we become conscious that the real meaning of life can be found in this very subtle (and damaged) relation, we will start changing. A very interesting point of view comes from the oriental wisdom and reinforces the idea: it is explained in the *wabi-sabi* context (KOREN, 2008), where Nature means many things. It refers to the dimension of physical reality untouched by men, things in their pure, original state. In this sense, Nature means all things of the earth, such as plants, animals, mountains, rivers, and also forces – sometimes calm, sometimes violent – of wind, rain, fire, and so on. But Nature in the *wabi-sabi* ethics also encompasses the human mind and all its artificial or unnatural thoughts and creations. In this sense, Nature means everything that exists, including the underlying principles of existence. Once again, under this philosophy, cities and Nature can be seen as the same object, as well urban regeneration and human rehabilitation can be faces of the same process.

Not only connected, but intertwined, thriven by Fourth Nature.

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