

TERRA. Revista de Desarrollo Local

e-ISSN: 2386-9968

Number 7 (2020), 228-262

DOI 10.7203/terra.7.18961

IIDL – Instituto Interuniversitario de Desarrollo Local

Steps towards the city of the three ecologies

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ARTICLE SECTION

Steps towards the city of the three ecologies

Abstract: Starting from the identification of the inescapable vectors for the ecological transition, the dissertation is developed around the so-called ecological paradigm, an already fully consolidated global view in which three epistemological fields converge: the ecological science, the emancipatory political theories and practices and the philosophical inquiries around human consciousness. As a framework of reference and plot thread, the epistemological perspective developed by Félix Guattari in his work *The three ecologies* (1989) has been used, based on what he defines as the three basic ecological dimensions: environmental, social and mental. This framework is especially suitable to address the multidimensional character of the new paradigm in relation to the urban-territorial reality, considered as a mental and social phenomenon in permanent interrelation with its environment, and as an spatial artifact product of the metabolic flows of energy, materials and information generated within a certain model of appropriation-transformation-distribution and consumption. The proposal of an autopoietic utopia, that is, a utopia in permanent self-creation, inseparable from the construction of a model of deliberative democracy and a model of open planning, really constitutes the core of the proposal. As a development of this proposal, a series of objectives and tools for a new urbanism inspired by the ecological paradigm is formulated.

Key words: Ecological Urbanism, Utopia, Ecosophy, Autopoiesis, Urban Metabolism, Open Planning.

Reception: November 06, 2020

Review: December 19, 2020

Acceptance: December 24, 2020

Citation:

Verdaguer, C. (2020). Pasos hacia la ciudad de las tres ecologías. *TERRA. Revista de Desarrollo Local*, (7), 228-262. DOI 10.7203/terra.7.18961

IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS / IDEES CLAU

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| <p>1. El reto de la crisis global exige un cambio profundo en nuestros modelos de planificación espacial.</p> | <p>1. The challenge of the global crisis demands a profound change in our spatial planning models.</p> | <p>1. El repte de la crisi global exigeix un canvi profund en els nostres models de planificació espacial.</p> |
| <p>2. Las dimensiones ambiental, social y mental deben formar parte ineludible de la planificación espacial ecológica.</p> | <p>2. The environmental, social and mental dimensions must be an inescapable part of ecological spatial planning.</p> | <p>2. Les dimensions ambiental, social i mental han de formar part ineludible de la planificació espacial ecològica.</p> |
| <p>3. El Espacio como Lugar debe ser el eje de la planificación urbana ecológica.</p> | <p>3. Space as a place must be the axis of ecological urban planning.</p> | <p>3. L'Espai com a Lloc ha de ser l'eix de la planificació urbana ecològica.</p> |
| <p>4. Enfoque holístico, participación ciudadana y monitorización continua son tres herramientas claves de la planificación ecológica.</p> | <p>4. Holistic approach, citizen participation and continuous monitoring are three key tools of ecological planning.</p> | <p>4. Enfocament holístic, participació ciutadana i monitoratge continu són tres eines claus de la planificació ecològica.</p> |
| <p>5. La ciudad de las tres ecologías responde a un enfoque utópico abierto y autopoietico.</p> | <p>5. The city of the three ecologies constitutes an open and autopoietic utopian approach.</p> | <p>5. La ciutat de les tres ecologies respon a un enfocament utòpic obert i autopoietic.</p> |

EXTENDED ABSTRACT¹

Global awareness of the environmental crisis has advanced during the two decades of the 21st century in proportion to its increasingly serious symptoms, and this is reflected at the global institutional scale.

The truth is that the challenge of 'global sustainability' is a difficult task, since it implies to work on certain inescapable vectors that ultimately require a reformulation of the relations between State, Market and Society, namely, the overall reduction in resource consumption, the redefinition of the concept of property and the promotion of bottom-up decision-making mechanisms.

These basic vectors are at the core of the human species' relationship with itself and with its environment and, as such, have been present in one way or another, generally in the form of unresolved conflicts, throughout the history of humanity.

In these formulations, all the dimensions that historically characterize the consolidation of the ecological paradigm as a vision of the world converge and intertwine in an inseparable way.

The multidimensional characterization of the ecological paradigm as a synthesis between Ecological Science, Critical Theory and New Consciousness suggests in turn a triadic approach based on the three fundamental variables present in the paradigm thus defined, namely, the Mental, Social and Environmental, linked all three for Ecology as a transversal dimension.

This approach through the Three Ecologies, based explicitly on the formulation of the philosopher, psychotherapist and social activist Félix Guattari², who defines it as an ecosophy, does not constitute a mere formal artifice but rather an epistemological tool of great operability due to its inherent heuristic potential, i.e, to its ability to maintain the three basic dimensions of the relationship of the human species with its environment in the same plane of attention, thus favouring the identification at all levels of the interrelationships between them and, therefore, facilitating the implementation of strategies for the effective application of the ecological paradigm in all areas.

Applied to the urban phenomenon, this framework of concepts derived from the ecosophic vision has in turn allowed us to identify another set of premises from which to orient the objectives and tools for a new ecological urbanism:

- i) The historical process of evolution of human settlements and the appearance and growth of the city can be described as a product of the dialectic between an emerging order, based on the gradual accumulation of micro-decisions based on needs and problems, and an imposed order, derived from the need for rapid implementation in the territory.
- ii) The phenomenological character of the ecological paradigm makes it especially suitable for formulating the dichotomy between Space and Place, reserving the first term for the concept of abstract space, usual in philosophy and mathematics, and the second for the idea of geographic space, endowed with physical attributes and comparable to the concept of environment.

¹ Traducción exclusiva de los autores / Authors' exclusive translation.

² Guattari, F. (1989). *Les trois écologies*, Editions Galilée, París.

iii) The struggle around the aesthetic dimension takes on special importance in an area of the collective par excellence such as the urban realm, in which, together with the imposition of morpho-typological patterns of location, use, and social segregation, has reigned the imposition of aesthetic canons by the sectors that have historically dominated the space production process.

All the above premises can be considered as elements for a unitary theory of space in order to build a spatial language conceived for its practical use by all citizens in a collective process of spatial planning.

If a common motto had to be formulated to the series of framework criteria that we have just presented in a synthetic way, it would be that of “assuming complexity as a challenge and not as a problem”.

Following the triadic scheme of the three ecologies, an effort has been made to synthesize both objectives and tools in triads of formulations conceived as different portals through which to explore the same multidimensional global landscape.

A first triad tries to encompass all the premises that we have covered from the perspective of the three ecologies and in relation to the urban phenomenon under three fundamental objectives:

- i) Saving and conservation of energy and materials and insertion in the cycles of the Biosphere: there is no possible ecological transition towards a different model of industrial metabolism in equilibrium with the Biosphere that will does not go through a reduction in absolute terms of the consumption of energy and material resources.
- ii) Integration in context: the idea of a space with attributes destined to become a Place implicitly implies the need for any anthropic intervention to be carried out starting from what exists and in dialogue with it.
- iii) Quality of life in terms of health, comfort and social welfare: the objective cannot be other than to ensure that the spatial, environmental and socio-economic conditions for our settlements to guarantee the three components that characterize the quality of life: health, comfort and social welfare. Liveability, conviviality, social cohesion and economic well-being constitute the specific goals associated with this objective.

It could be said that this triad of objectives covers practically all the key aspects related to urban and territorial planning, but this does not automatically guarantee progress in relation to the three great inescapable vectors for the ecological transition.

The search for the synergies that appear clearly when considering this triad of objectives constitutes, without a doubt, the best strategy.

The new tools that emerge as a corollary to the identification of the objectives for a new urbanism and to the shortcomings of the current forms of planning can be grouped into a second triad of instrumental areas in order to facilitate their strategic articulation:

- i) Holistic approach: This refers to the need to adopt an approach that simultaneously takes into account all the dimensions at stake in the space production process.
- ii) Citizen participation: The various combinations of solutions that appear as a result of a pre-established series of objectives can never be exclusively technical but must emerge from the democratic deliberation among all the agents affected by a certain process.
- iii) Evaluation and monitoring: It is essential to bring to the fore collective self-learning strategies based on the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the results and the

multidimensional impacts of the chosen solutions, with the aim of endorsing or refuting the hypotheses based on which the decisions were made, as well as adapting the course of the process to the new emerging realities.

Having exposed these three instrumental areas, we should insist that the use of these tools does not in itself guarantee that all interventions are automatically directed towards the terrain of ecological transition.

The need for a different concept of utopia, i.e, a different way of relating to the future appears evident. On the one hand, it must be very attentive to all the indications, both negative and positive, that the future sends us from the present. On the other hand, it must be based on the hypothesis that the present always offers us room, little as it might be, for maneuver in order to counteract or boost these signals and that also the past offers us many lessons on how to take advantage of these margins of action.

The connotations that the term utopia has acquired over time as a synonym for a desirable scenario dreamed of and, at the same time, as an illusory vision, and, on the other hand, the realization that many dreams have become dystopian nightmares when they become reality, constitute the clearest demonstration of the contradictions and risks inherent in the utopia conceived as an imposed order, rather than as the dynamic outcome of an emerging order.

And yet, regardless of these contradictions, the need to construct detailed representations of a desirable future continues to be part of all transformative discourses, which continue to rely on the instituting power of such images.

Assuming all these contradictions, it is possible to accept that the open planning model that we propose here is also a utopia, as it is based on an imagined possible future. But it is also an utopia because of what it offers as an instituting vision, namely, a series of programmatic elements for action in the urban-territorial environment based on the ecological paradigm. In short, it is an ecologically and socially desirable utopia conceived to guide mental, social and institutional changes.

It could therefore be defined as an autopoietic, homeostatic or self-regulatory utopia, in the sense that it builds itself over time, articulating hypotheses about plausible futures and correcting its course based on the results achieved, always with the objective of guarantee the balance of the human species as an indissoluble part of the Biosphere. Understanding the term City in the symbolic sense of the common home where human beings share all the resources of the Biosphere, this ongoing utopia would be the City of the Three Ecologies.