

CITIES WITH AN INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE FACE A MAJOR URBAN TRANSFORMATION CHALLENGE

Posted on 18/04/2024 by Naider

The city, both as a concept and in its physical expression, faces one of the greatest transformation challenges of recent times. The experience of the past decades has left us with countless examples of what has worked, but, above all, of **what has failed in the model of cities** that were built and expanded as a **result of the industrial boom** and the needs it generated. Conditioned by the acceleration of this revolution in most areas (exponential increase in production, growth of the economy, increase in population, and ultimately, the acceleration of the pace of life), cities grew with this same paradigm: a production and consumption model with a linear approach, based on the exploitation of finite resources and dependent on fossil fuels, accelerated and segmented, which has understood **the environment as a mere unlimited supplier** of different services and unlimited resources, obviating any kind of connection between them.

As a result, the natural and socio-economic environment itself has suffered the effects of this model, with the current **climate emergency**, among others, as the main example of **the impact** of this global production system at the local level. This scenario has led to the **search for new formulas to transform** these spaces, the way they are understood, configured and experienced, in order to **restore the balance** between all the elements that coexist in the urban environment. Social, economic and environmental systems aligned and interconnected, understood as one.

Nothing could be further away than **Bilbao**. An industrial city that underwent a major boom in the last century, which **grew turning its back on** the harmful impacts that would be generated years later by the degradation of its main **ecosystems** (such as the estuary, for example), because it only considered them from a utilitarian and mercantile approach. Impacts that are still palpable today, despite the efforts to transform and regenerate the town, and which anyone who knew it 30 years ago still remembers with intensity in the streets.

Faced with this challenge, **an ecological approach that integrates and interconnects** all the elements that interact in the environment is **essential**. An approach that can be scaled on a global scale (planet), on an urban scale (city) or on a smaller level (neighbourhood); and even applied to our bodies, as an ecosystem of organs, internal and external factors that need to be balanced in order to guarantee a healthy system. At the end of the day, we are talking about the health of our ecosystems, whatever their size and context.

And why ecology? Because the basis of its study is ecosystems. **Cities are urban ecosystems** where human beings constitute their main component, being the most complex systems created by the human species. If their transformation is to be approached holistically, we are obliged to include all the elements and factors that affect them in the new model, a complex and diverse system.

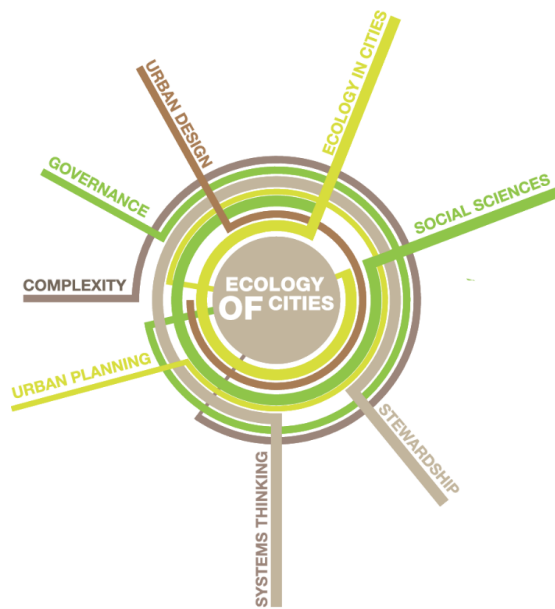


Figura 1. Diagrama de la naturaleza multidisciplinar de la Ecología Urbana
Fuente: McPhearson et al, 2016

Starting from urban ecology as a paradigm, its operational form translates into **ecosystemic urbanism**.

If we understand urban planning as the practice and instrument for the creation and transformation of cities to address current challenges, ecosystemic urbanism leads us to reformulate its bases to **broaden the focus, recover the interconnections** of all systems and thus **increase our capacity for anticipation and resilience** in the face of the current uncertainties of inherited urban systems. This approach requires taking into account the environment (the immediate surroundings and the support and sustenance of the activities and flows that the city requires) from all aspects: social, environmental, economic and cultural. The solution will be to achieve and maintain a balance between the variables involved in this context.

Fórmulas más concretas que intentan traer a tierra estos conceptos son las **soluciones basadas en la naturaleza** como actuaciones de transformación y adaptación concretas o integrales de la ciudad, y la **economía circular** como estrategia supramunicipal de metabolismo de las ciudades y su entorno, pudiendo ser aplicado a su vez en todos los niveles de la cadena.

Adoptar este tipo de soluciones y pensamientos en la planificación urbanística desde las entidades locales y llevarla hasta el ámbito privado de las empresas y la ciudadanía es el imperativo que tenemos como sociedad moderna. Sociedad que debe recuperar la conexión ancestral con la naturaleza y enfrentarse con dicha sabiduría y el conocimiento actual al precio de nuestro legado industrial.



Figura 2. Estrategia de Metabolismo Social Urbano (SUMS)
Fuente: Evolution Eco Engine

