URBAN SPRAWL / THE CLAIM FOR LIMITS

Victor Neves
Dr. Architect, Lisbon-Portugal

ABSTRACT:The urban sprawl has had terrible consequences in Europe, and specially in my country-Portugal, (member of the European Community) . But this phenomenon also affects the underdeveloped world and the poorest areas of the planet, and it is associated with the uncontrolled growth of cities, the increase of population and with housing deficit. The archipelago of Cape Verde (a Portuguese colony until 1975) is an interesting case-study. In Cape Verde, the phenomenon of urban- sprawl is visible, especially in its major cities- Mindelo and Praia (the capital). Cape Verde seems to have everything that could be the harsh reality of the coming decades of the XXI century. Water shortage, deforestation, displacement of population from the country to the cities. And cities without limits. It is a good case-study to understand how our contemporary cities can be controlled in its growth. And the main question is: How can we limit the city, in our contemporary world? And the forest? - Can it be an urban limit? And in the specific case of Cape Verde, is the forest sustainable as an urban containment? Is the forest viable in a territory with, very irregular and low rainfall?
KEYWORDS: Urban-sprawl ; Limits; Forest ; Water

1- Introduction: a project for a city

The complexity of the urban phenomena is unanimous, but we believe that a different and simpler approach to urban problems is practicable. Using new and more effective tools and more communication with society. And also a continuously open and dynamic approach in their critical readings, always enhancing creative resolutions to specific problems, of each urban reality.

The contemporary world is increasingly volatile and less fixed in their canons. Due to the growing economic dynamism and openness of democratic societies, new standards and regulatory matrices are continually emerging in our relation with the surrounding territory. This situation, creates very serious mistakes in the traditional reading of urban territories, which are planned and organized with modeler solutions that often fail in their responses to stimuli, caused by demographic and economic pressures (and also by political pressures, sometimes). It is inside of this (il) logic of constant failure, that we have to lighten the collateral damage of an urban growth without rule and without order.

The city is taking the form of a polycentric and limitless city. It uses a model of urban growing that has reached terrible, and in some cases, irreversible, consequences.

A manifesto for a New Urbanism is necessary, again. A hymn to the compact city and a critique to the urban deregulation and urban - sprawl. Which is the same to ask whether the " big" city is inevitable and what are the alternatives to current forms of urban growth , applied to mega-cities but also small and medium-sized cities .
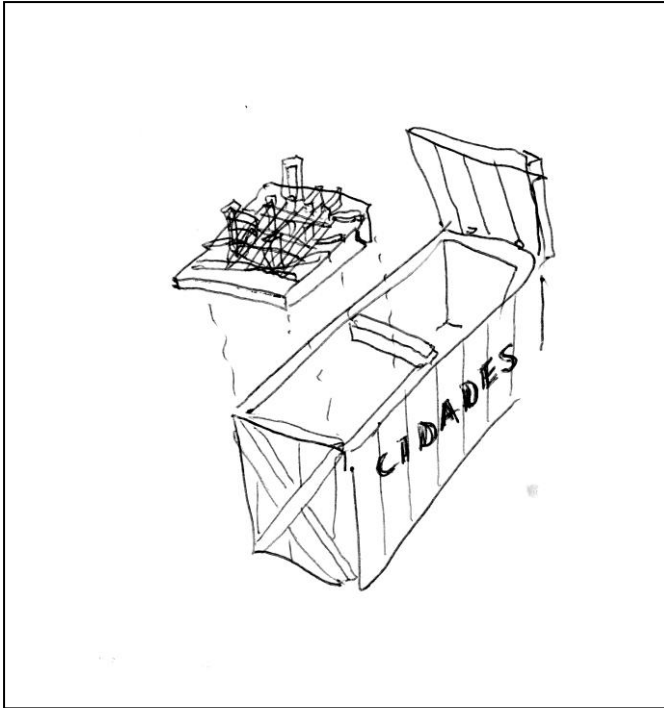
Fig.1: The Concentrated city. A pack-city. Drawing by Victor Neves

Fig.2:Urban Sprawl in Pinhal Novo- Portugal

2- The urban-sprawl:

The urban sprawl has had terrible consequences in Europe, and specially in my country-Portugal (member of the European Community) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portugal : occupation and degradation of agricultural soils ; the contamination of aquifer resources, the huge costs of infrastructures (for new urban settlements), and, last but not least, the visual and physical degradation of the landscape. But this phenomenon also affects the underdeveloped world and the poorest areas of the planet, and it is associated with the uncontrolled growth of cities, the increase of population and the lack of housing.

3- Cape Verde: a case- study:

The archipelago of Cape Verde (a Portuguese colony until 1975) is an interesting case-study http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Verde   . In Cape Verde, the phenomenon of urban sprawl is visible, especially in its major cities- Mindelo and Praia (the capital). Praia, suffers from population pressure causing an urban growth without order, where the prevailing moral values are implemented no matter what conditions, in a space full of imbalances. A ceiling for all is fundamental , but a humanized city, physically ordered, providing quality public spaces, it is also desirable and urgent.

This brings us to the beginning of the founding of the city and its growth, and to the understanding of its physical limits, through a contemporary reading.

Fig.3:Urban- Sprawl. Praia city- Cape Verde

       Cape Verde seems to have everything that could be the harsh reality of the coming decades of the XXI century. Water shortage , deforestation, displacement of population from the country to the cities. And cities without limits.

       As a case-study, it could help to understand how our contemporary cities can be controlled in its growth. And the main question is: how can we limit the city, in our contemporary world? The classic use of highways, railway lines, water – lines , are, as we know, easily surmountable by urban- sprawl.

Fig.4: Praia city - Cape Verde - The new radial highway . Can it be an urban limit?

Fig.5: The forest is a public space

<The Forest: And the forest? - The forest, as we know, contains an environmental and economic potential. And has an ethical value still recognized by our society, because cutting down a tree is still objectionable in our society. But can it be a urban limit?

Figs.5 /6: The outskirts of Praia city -Cape Verde. Photo-montage (Victor Neves)

And in the specific case of Cape Verde, is the forest sustainable as an urban containment? Can it be an element of the urban form?

Is the forest viable in a territory with, very irregular and low rainfall?

Fig.7/8: Praia, Cape Verde city. Photo-montage (Victor Neves)

In order to have a proper land use, is necessary to have a reforestation agenda, adapted to the climate and soils of Cape Verde

< Water But there is also a direct association between forest and water management. Basically, it means not wasting water when it rains, and recovering and recycling water, contemplating adequate (and imaginative) systems to prevent its evaporation. But we can also use waste water. The implementation of macrophyte ponds for waste water regeneration may be feasible for reforestation activities www.fao.org/docrep/t0551e/t0551e05.htm

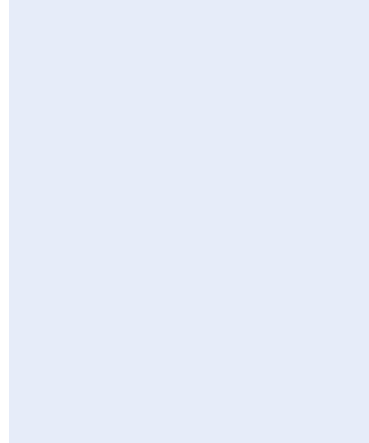Fig.9: Cape Verde – A small pond for retention of rainwater

>The City: In a near future, our cities will work on network and people will have a mobility of communication never seen before. Physical communication and info- communication. .

Smaller cities and concentrated cities, with a wide possibility of creating jobs , either through local employment or through remote employment, using digital communication networks (and probably tele-work), will have a positive impact at social, economic and urban levels. Once concentrating urban areas, other areas will be released for agriculture, for livestock, for forest or for fields of photovoltaic power, providing a better and eco-sustainable future. Rural and urban areas are economically, socially and environmentally interdependent. Cities and towns are engines of growth contributing to the development of both rural and urban human settlements. In Africa the population in the rural areas represents a majority and, for that reason, integrated physical planning and balanced attention to rural and urban living conditions are of crucial importance for all African nations.

Full advantage must be taken of the complementary contributions and linkages between rural and urban areas by giving appropriate attention to their different economic, social and environmental requirements. While addressing urban poverty, it is also essential to eradicate rural poverty and to improve living conditions, as well as to create employment and educational opportunities in rural settlements and small and medium-sized cities and towns in rural areas;

In this context, we will be expecting a new model of city. A limited city and self-sufficient or at least environmentally friendly city, a city which could ensure housing, jobs, public spaces; a city that has physical and recognized boundaries (because the city of the future has no temporal or spatial boundaries – it is the city of information) .That will be the way to build an idea of place and a social community. Is it a utopia?

Fig.10: What do these young people in the desert?
These are images of the first campaigns for reforestation of Cape Verde. The scene takes place in the "wilderness" of the Mount Vaca at the top of Pembrokeshire of St. Philip in Santiago (1977)

4- REFERENCES:
- *Mitchell, J. william,* E-Topia, Barcelona, GG, 2001
- *Neves, Victor* –Globalização, in Sebentas d´Arquitectura**, nº3, Edições Universidade Lusíada, Lisboa, 2001.
- *Virílio, Paul* – A Inércia Polar, Lisboa, D. Quixote, 1993
- *Virílio, Paul* – Cibermundo: A Política Do Pior, Lisboa, Teorema, 2000
VEGARA, Alfonso; LAS RIVAS Juan Luis. Territórios Inteligentes, ed. Fundacion METROPOLI

- Collaborators : Mário Henriques (Arch.); Andreia Alves Arch.)

Fig.11:   A concentrated City ?. Drawing by Victor Neves

ANNEX: THE NUCLEUS CITY- MANIFESTO FOR A CONCENTRATED CITY

1-The nucleus city is nourished by the attractive force of a nucleus. But it can be divided into sub-nuclei, always attracted by the shape of a vital core.

2-The nucleus city has limits. It demands   the concentration and filling of all voids within its limit. And rejects the dispersion (urban-sprawl).

3-The nucleus city has identifiable measure*s* and has FORM. The nucleus city occupies   urban categorized soil, only. The nucleus city coexists with agricultural land, with forest, with community gardens, green parks and with ecological reserves.
The nucleus city promotes the eco-sustainability.

4 - The nucleus city proclaims urban concentration and the regeneration of forest and of agricultural land, as a way of creating public wealth , economic and social recovery. But the nucleus city is also and based on the unlimited spread of information networks.
The nucleus city does not need government. It only need to be governed from the existence of a limit.
6-The nucleus city is reactionary? No, the nucleus city is deeply democratic, because it his designed on the basis of an unlimited freedom to communicate and inform.