

ISSN: 2227-7994

# FORUM **A+P**

INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF ARCHITECTURE AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

GOING HIGH! The Pros and Cons of City Verticalisation

VOLUME 25/OCTOBER 2022



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS INSTITUTION

PhD Doc. Sotir Dhamo // POLIS University (AL)

Prof. Dr. Besnik Aliaj // POLIS University (AL)

PhD Dritan Shutina // Co-Plan (AL)

## EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

*Head of the Editorial Committee*

PhD Ledian Bregasi // POLIS University (AL)

Assoc. Prof. Andrew Charleson // Victoria University (NZ)

Reader, PhD Antonino Di Raimo // Portsmouth University (UK)

PhD Elona Karafili // POLIS University (AL)

PhD Matevž Čelik // Future Architecture  
Programme Director (SVN)

Emer. Prof. Michael Batty // Bartlett (UK)

Prof. PhD Michelangelo Russo // Federico II (IT)

Prof. PhD Roberto Di Giulio // UniFe (IT)

PhD Skender Luarasi // POLIS University (AL)

PhD Sonia Jojic // POLIS University (AL)

PhD Valerio Perna // POLIS University (AL)

## SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Asst. Prof. PhD Anastasios Tellios // AUTH (GR)

PhD Endrit Marku // POLIS University (AL)

Emer. Prof. Franco Purini // Sapienza (IT)

Assoc. Prof. PhD Giuseppe Mincoelli // UniFe (IT)

Assoc. Prof. PhD Kiersten Muenchinger // UO (USA)

Assoc. Prof. PhD Kostandinos Giakoumis // K. Logos (AL)

Srlect. PhD Loris Rossi // MMU (UK)

PhD Peter Nientied // Hogeschool NCOI (NL)

PhD Rudina Toto // CO-Plan (AL)

Assoc. Prof. PhD Theo Zaffagnini // UniFe (IT)

## EDITORIAL TEAM

MSc Franklind Jesku // POLIS University (AL)

**Cover Design:** PhD Valerio Perna

**Guest Editors:** PhD Fabrizio Aimar

PhD Ermal Hoxha

PhD Keti Hoxha

**Printed by:** Pegi

**ISSN: 2227-7994**

## Contacts:

Rr. Autostrada Tiranë-Durrës, Km.5, Kashar  
KP 2995, Tirana Albania

Tel: +355.(0)4.24074 - 20 / 21

Cel: +355.(0)69.20 - 34126 / 81881

Email: [forumap@universitetipolis.edu.al](mailto:forumap@universitetipolis.edu.al)

[www.forumap.org](http://www.forumap.org)

*Forum A+P: Interdisciplinary Journal of Architecture and Built Environment*, published by POLIS University since 2010, is the only scientific and cultural journal in the Albanian-speaking countries in the fields of architecture and urban planning. This journal is recognized by the Ministry of Education and Science, the Academic Degrees Evaluation Committee and has an ISSN international registration code.

**Vol.25/October 2022**

## **GOING HIGH! THE PROS AND CONS OF CITY VERTICALISATION**

### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

#### **EDITORIAL**

Introduction from the Editors FABRIZIO AIMAR, ERMAL HOXHA, KETI HOXHA	06
--	----

#### **WORKSHOP REPORTS**

Waiting for eVolo - 2023 Skyscraper Competition VALERIO PERNA, KETI HOXHA	12
Urban Regeneration Strategies. The Tirana Case Study DIMITRA NIKOLAOU, NICHOLAS ANASTASOPOULOS, ELEFThERIA KOSTANTINIDOU, KLODJAN XHEXHI, BLERIM NIKA	15
Framing Architecture OLSON LAMAJ, VJOLA ZIU	17
Theory of Architecture for Towers ALESSANDRA COMO, LUISA SMERAGLIUOLO PERROTTA, SIMONA TALENTI, ANNARITA TEODOSIO, MARSELA PLYKU DEMAJ	19
Emergency Architecture in Resilient Times FRANKLIND JESKU, AVRILI MESHI, MICHELE DI MARCO, ANNA SILENZI	23
Morphological Research on Ways of Verticalization. The Case of Tirana ERMAL HOXHA, GENTI AVDIJA	26
Piloting Citizen Science and other RRI Practices in Ecosystem KEJT DHRAMI, IMELDI SOKOLI, RUDINA TOTO, RODION GJOKA	28
Archipreneurship: Going High! In-Between Pros and Cons of City Verticalization. MARKUS NEUBER, GJERGJI DUSHNIKU	31
Smart Sustainable City Tirana ARTAN KACANI, ENEIDA MUHAMUCI, ARMELA REKA	33
IoT User Interface Design and Development Applied to Smart Skyscrapers LUCA LEZZERINI, ARJOLA XHELILI	37
<b>INVITED PAPERS</b>	
Verticality in Milan Between Past and Future SIMONA TALENTI	40
Invisible Tools: Shaping New York City's Skyscrapers DIETRICH NEUMANN	49
The Balkan Skyscraper: How Tall is Tall Enough? DARIO TRABUCCO	56
Thoughts on Urban Verticalization. Going Up and Building High for the Future City: Learning from Israel and beyond. HQ ARCHITECTS	62

## **SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH PAPERS**

- Vertical Farms: from Agriculture to a New City Architecture 70  
THOMAS BISIANI, SARA BASSO, PIERLUIGI MARTOLANA, ADRIANO VENUDO
- Vertical Cemeteries: a Changing Paradigm 84  
FRANKLIND JESKU
- Fear and Awe in the Vertical City: the Affective Space of "Going High" 92  
FEDERICO DE MATTEIS
- Housing and High-Rise Building: a Longstanding Love-Hate Story Is there an Upper Limit to Living on High Ground? 100  
LUCA REALE
- An integrated inhabiting: What are we Talking About When we Talk About it. 108  
LUCIANO DE BONIS, GIOVANNI OTTAVIANO

## **TELQUEL ARCHITECTURE**

- Does the High-Rise Building Typology meet the needs for City Densification? 114  
The case of Tirana, Albania  
BESNIK ALIAJ
- TAW 2022 as a Vantage Observatory of an International Phenomenon. The Horizontal Dimension of Verticality. 118  
FABRIZIO AIMAR, ERMAL HOXHA, KETI HOXHA

## **BOOK REVIEW**

- Theory of Restoration (Book by Cesare Brandi) 122  
LLAZAR KUMARAKU
- Ecovillages and Ecocities. Bioclimatic Applications from Tirana, Albania (Book by Klodian Xhexhi) 124  
SANTINA DI SALVO

## **DRAWINGS**

- /Imagine. 128  
VALERIO PERNA

# Housing and High-Rise Building: a Longstanding Love-Hate Story

## Is there an Upper Limit to Living on High Ground?

LUCA REALE

*La Sapienza University*

### Abstract

*Climate change and the global pandemic seem to be pushing urbanization in opposite directions: the opposition between densification and distancing could open up, in the coming years, an increasingly frequent collision between the conflicting demands of climate and public health issues. However, the push for new concentration, after several decades in which low- and medium-density settlement patterns were favored, is now seen not only as a necessity on the urban level, but also as a fertile architectural design opportunity. In the housing towers of modernity, the living experience has often clashed with the monofunctionality of buildings and the problem of the loss of any relationship with the street and the ground. Many architects since the 1960s have attempted to bring some common spaces, intermediate between public and private into elevation, but this has often been insufficient to transfer urban vitality within a residential building and ensure the connection of housing to the ground and street-life. Today there is an attempt to recover the "streets on the air" through the Hong Kong lesson of an integrated and connected city, or there is a return to experimenting on the urban block and Medium-rise blocks by attempting to simultaneously generate high-density and human scale, better connecting people with the urban ground and with each other. Finally, we try to prefigure a new kind of multilevel city, in which a common dimension of many functions related to living is shared in spaces distributed along the height of high-rise buildings, also taking inspiration from the spontaneous power of informal associations that teach us to foster relationships among people, variety and flexibility of spaces, leading the experience of living back to an idea of domesticity thus overcoming the modern idea of the machine city.*

### Keywords

Housing, urban density, multilevel city, Hong Kong, common

## Densification vs. distancing

The epidemic that swept the planet in the early 2020s, and which still threatens global health, has profoundly transformed the way we perceive space, both domestic and urban. Forced isolation for long periods in our homes and strict norms of spacing in urban spaces have on the one hand highlighted the stark inequalities relative to our private conditions, on the other altered even more radically the public dimension of the city. In recent years, ecological instances related to climate change and global warming have pushed us toward increasingly concentrated and compact city models, in which collective urban residence is preferred over the suburban single-family residence. That's to have more energy-efficient cities, accessibility and public services, vitality, cultural and social richness. So, the achievement of ever-higher density thresholds in human settlements-which in the early 1990s represented a minority trend in urban theories and early tentative attempts at anti-sprawl regulations-has become (before the covid 19 virus outbreak) the only possible attitude to ensure the environmental sustainability of the planet.

With the pandemic, and with the idea that we are likely to be in a condition that may happen again and again in the future, the social distance and physical disaggregation of people, imposed to limit the transmission of infection, have led to attempts to reduce densities wherever possible, running counter to what has just been stated.

This opposition between densification and distancing I believe that in a long-term perspective will open a conflict between the opposing demands of climate issues and public health. Above all, the coming future of our cities will be played out in the space between these two needs and in the new balance that architects will be able to find on the level of living and urban space.

Trying now to get out of the current pandemic conjuncture, let us then return to the idea that high-density housing is the most sustainable option for the future of our cities and that, by now, this approach is universally accepted. This is demonstrated even by the most extreme and controversial urban experiments: the recent "The Line", a linear city (170 km long, 200 m wide, and 500 m high) designed for 9 million inhabitants in the Saudi desert, on which work began this year, is based precisely on the idea of vertical living (Figure.1).

## Modern times

Focusing now on the topic of dwelling, the high-rise building, and even more so the skyscraper, still struggles today to establish themselves as the housing type of the future. Indeed, as a building type emblematic of the globalized city, it has become a symbol of the inequalities between the city of capital and the slums that besiege the planned city. And so even the linear city along a railway line (The line, in fact), an urban model already envisioned by Arturo Soria y Mata in the late 1800s, is back in vogue. In this short text, we first ask these simple questions: can there be a skyscraper set on equity and social justice? Can the vertically built city still relate its inhabitants to the idea of domesticity and daily living? What is the height-boundary above

which the relationship between home and city, between residence and public space, loses value?

Contemporary trends related to inhabiting a higher-density city have created and continue to create new housing models. Working on density means shifting the focus from quantitative data to qualitative aspects, focusing on experimentation and typological hybridization, on the flexibility (spatial and temporal) of housing, on the search for the permeability of blocks and building porosity, and on the reactivation of urban systems and fabrics through the presence of collective residence and the inclusion of new functions and ways of living (Reale 2015).

Public opinion has historically established a love-hate relationship even before towards the high-rise building, towards the metropolis itself. Even the classical metaphors of urban sociology, in fact, consider the city according to images with a predominantly positive or decidedly negative value. Especially in the North American tradition, the city is seen as a place of dirt, discomfort, danger, and pollution or, conversely, as a center of wealth, culture, sociability and change (Rodwin, Hollister, 1984, 97-117). This assessment, almost aprioristic, sometimes true pre-judgment, has produced interpretive syntheses that have, from time to time, depicted a "bazaar city", a center of exchanges but also of different experiences and cultures; a "jungle city", crowded, intricate and potentially dangerous; an "organism city", a collection of parts, endowed with heart and brain, in which each part functions for the common welfare; a "machine city", in which this operating mechanism is not aimed at the common good but at producing the wealth of a small part of the population. The machine city, an illustrative figure of modernity, arises precisely from the idea of the division of labor, which produces a condition of subservience of the citizen in the metropolis, embodied by the Charlie Chaplin of *Modern Times* (1936), in which the protagonist is alienated because he is physically subordinated to the machine itself, which is organized instead to guarantee the economic interest of its owners exclusively.

But the myth of the modern city soon tends to reverse this image of the city, in the name of progress. No longer a negative metaphor, in the hygienist vision of the avant-garde architects of the 1920s, the machine city is a metaphor for an efficient and rational, and consequently healthy, city. The rationalist city of Gropius or Le Corbusier claims light, air and space and is based on the high-rise building, but appropriately spaced, "resting" on neutral ground, hardly ever stratified and complex in operation and activity. However, the relationship between height and density is a fundamental fact to be taken into account and we will discuss this later.

## Amsterdam vs. Johannesburg

Going beyond these classical metaphors, at bottom so schematic and imperfect, the modern city is nonetheless (optimistically) perceived as a protected territory, the site of innovation and social integration, the place par excellence of cultural and economic development. In the urban context, the social classes, at least until the last century, could easily meet, confront each

other, and sometimes even clash to the point of staging the dialectical conflict of democracy, but always with a view to the social emancipation of the most disadvantaged classes. However, in the last two decades, the distance between the city of the rich and the city of the poor seems to have become unbridgeable: urban space is physically separated, characterized by boundaries and fences, and less and less used for collective purposes (Secchi 2013). And urban design tends to reinforce this increasingly polarized condition, which divides places, activities, human and social categories that are not homogeneous with each other.

Synthesizing even excessively, we could say that contemporary urban space tends to lose all its potential for urbanity. According to geographer Jacques Lévy, urbanity is, in fact, everything that characterizes the richness and complexity of urban experience. The division of labor and the consequent separation of activities and functions, as well as the increasingly extreme polarization between the haves and have-nots, have increasingly undermined the condition of urbanity, coming today to contrast, on the one hand, a city that is based on intermixing, and on the other on a city that tends to separate. Lévy calls these two urban forms the “Amsterdam model” and the “Johannesburg model”.

*The debate on desirable urbanity has become polarized around two models of urbanity: one is the “Amsterdam model”, which accepts urbanity and the exposure to otherness this implies, while the other - the “Johannesburg model” - rejects it, accepting urbanity only reluctantly by seeking to privatize everything that can be privatized. [...] the first model, if adopted by inhabitants, tends to produce a “collected city” one finds mainly in large city centers in Europe and Asia. The second model, on the other hand, produces the “scattered and fragmented urbanity” often found in small towns and city outskirts in North America and Africa (Lévy 2013)*

But beyond these simplifications, what the recent global pandemic has taught us is that the thing we absolutely cannot give up is relationships with other people, which means being able to meet each other, even accidentally, and having the opportunity to share with others, physically, the space of the city. To do this, we also need to bring our differences into play and “practice a certain kind of modesty: to live one among many, involved in a world that does not reflect only oneself. In Robert Venturi’s words, living one among many allows for ‘richness of meaning rather than clarity of meaning.’ This is the ethics of the open city” (Sennet 2018). If we remove this, the city simply becomes, at best, convenient in its being efficient, a machine precisely.

### **Above the canopy**

After the revolution of modernity, the contemporary city is in a constant quest to recapture somehow “the exciting concentration of street and dwelling that was accomplished in 19th-century Paris” (Benjamin 2000, 474).

Perhaps the most glaring attempt to compensate for this loss

is the idea of “streets on the air” conceived by the Smithsons in the 1960s. In a sketch published in 1967 in *Urban structuring*, Alison and Peter Smithson considering mature trees as an element of structuring a site “as found”, note this consideration: above the 6th floor “it can be accepted that old forms of contact with the ground are no longer valid” (Figure.2). The concept of threshold, so dear to the Smithsons, is here “translated” from a planimetric condition to sectional representation, again within their research on the intermediate space between home and city (Smithson 1967). Above the canopies of a huge tree, at the height of about twenty meters, the direct perceptual link between dwelling and urban space is thus lost. And where the relationship between the street and the ground is lost, the architects attempt to bring up some intermediate spaces between public and private, spaces that the Smithsons call “streets on the air”. It is like admitting the impossibility of establishing a relationship of domesticity and familiarity with outdoor space above a certain altitude. It is the same issue that Gropius noted many years earlier (Gropius 1962, 103-115) when, developing the theme of the high house, he points out the difficulty of child supervision as the dwellings lose contact with the ground.

Where architecture has attempted (with little success, to be sure) to transfer properly public, or at least not directly residential, spaces to height, something has always been lacking. The streets on the air of Robin Hood Gardens as well as the empty floor of Corviale in Rome have, for example, failed in different ways. In the Smithsons’ landmark work in London - designed in 1968 by Alison and Peter Smithson and completed in 1972 - the condition of uniformity and social poverty and, above all, the economic pressure on an all-too-central area of the city has, after much controversy and attempts at rescue, led to the demolition of the intervention. This, paradoxically, occurred in the same year that the Grafton-curated Venice Biennale Freespace celebrated the building as a masterpiece of modern living<sup>1</sup> (Figure.3). Nowadays, the western portion of the complex has already been replaced by a series of “respectable” and anonymous residential and office buildings, while the eastern portion is waiting to be replaced in the same manner.

In Rome, after years of discussion about possible demolition of the very long Corviale building-neighborhood, the decision was made instead to retain the architectural organism (11 levels high), which, however, has been completely distorted by the transformation of the so-called “free floor” into simple apartments. The fourth floor of Corviale should have constituted a “street at height” with stores and services, thus establishing that link with the urban street that on the lower levels is instead deliberately (ideologically) denied. In fact, the Corviale building has a ground floor with garages for cars and a first level of cellars, the large macro-stairways (5 for the whole building almost a kilometer long) would have, in the intention of the planners, instead directly connected the public “little squares” with bus stops to the street at height.

<sup>1</sup>*Robin Hood Gardens. A Ruin in Reverse. 16th International Architecture Exhibition - Venice Biennale, Freespace. Special Project of La Biennale di Venezia with the Victoria & Albert Museum.*



The more recent suspended plaza of the Mirador building in Sanchinarro near Madrid, designed by the Dutch MVRDV with Blanca Leó in 2005, attempts another route. Through the creation of an urban landmark that differs from the repetitive development of the city by compact six-story blocks, they envision a building that, by forgoing the traditional condominium courtyard, on the one hand preserves a much more generous portion of public space at the urban level, and on the other hand "restores" the public dimension of the courtyard in a semi-public sky plaza forty meters above ground level. The suspended plaza, directly accessible by an elevator from the plaza surrounding the building, is a belvedere (mirador) towards the landscape of the Guadarrama Mountains. In the design idea, it was supposed to be a space available to condominium residents but also to neighborhood residents. Unanimously considered a fiasco, it actually (in an early version of the design) would have provided a direct escalator from the urban elevation; who knows if it would have worked if it had been built as in this preliminary design?

Reflecting on these repeated failures, it also comes to mind that many experiments on collective residence between the 1960s and 1980s are indebted to Le Corbusier's *unité d'habitations*. A synthesis of architecture and urban planning, conceived as actual vertical cities (about 50 m high) founded on the idea of the living machine, *unités* were thus explored, extolled, and criticized (and five examples were built in Europe), while the other figure of collective living that the Swiss master had been working on since the 1920s was soon set aside and never experimented with realization. We are talking about the *immeuble villas*, a project that remained on paper, much less radical at heart than the *unités* because it would have been a mediation between the idea of the traditional urban fabric and modern innovations in terms of sunlight and ventilation. The height of the *immeuble villas* would not have exceeded 10 levels, preserving, despite the height, the relationship with the courtyard and the double-height terraces/roof gardens adjacent to each dwelling. This model would certainly have better embodied the contemporary needs for outdoor and appurtenant housing spaces (public and private) with direct accessibility at height, and as such, its rapid eclipse seems almost paradoxical.

### **Learning from Hong Kong**

So the idea of bringing people to live at height, and with them, some collective functions would seem to come out defeated by the experiences carried out in the Western world. Yet, in very distant and different contexts, something different has happened. The contexts in which the transfer of collective spaces from the urban height upwards has shown its effectiveness, and also a new "historicized" experimentation, are the Asian hyperdense city, particularly the unique and very peculiar one of Hong Kong. Indeed, in this metropolis inhabited by more than 7 million people, the question of space (public or private) is an extremely critical issue. Hong Kong is one of the cities with the highest population density in the world and the least available building space. For this reason, public streets have a layering

of paths that are duplicated underground and at an elevation of about 10 meters above the ground. This suspended pedestrian viability, linked to elevators and escalators, is not a simple connection between one building body and another but makes up a veritable network of paths that sometimes enter high-rise buildings at a commercial elevation or intersect the cores of residential blocks, or remain tangential to some entrances or even come out onto roof gardens or microscopic public spaces. Squeezed between the sea and the mountains, Hong Kong thus constitutes a laboratory of urban experimentation where housing, protected natural areas, spaces and public mobility interact in sometimes surprising ways.

The elevated passages, called skywalks, reminiscent of the pedestrian paths of Smithson's *Hauptstadt Berlin* (1957-1958), increase in some cases their section and thus become transit systems and places of staying. It is not uncommon on festive days to encounter Hong Kongers, or more often, immigrant communities (Filipinos, Indonesians, etc.) who pause on this network of pedestrian structures (almost always covered but in the open air thanks to the always mild climate) for birthday parties, communal lunches with family and friends, dancing and chatting, collective viewings of TV series, etc. (Figure.4).

This is also because Hong Kong is the city in the world with the least living space per inhabitant, and it is, therefore, natural that social and convivial activities can never take place within the domestic walls but must necessarily take place in urban space. A city without ground (Frampton, Solomon, Wong 2012) that cannot be mapped traditionally but is understood through axonometric cutaway rather than floor plan (Figure.5). The dense network of street-level, elevated, and underground walkways, though limited to the skywalk network of Hong Kong's central business district (CBD) are thus effective-compared to, for example, the 1960s-70s European experiments-at least for two other reasons. First, they constitute a network and not individual chunks isolated from each other. Second, this network is grafted onto a very high-density city with great proximity between business and the built environment. So these spaces are always very busy and are sized to accommodate incredibly high flows of pedestrians (Wai, Wan 2007), especially during weekday daylight hours, partly because they directly connect predominantly commercial and tertiary buildings.

### **Dwelling and revenge of the common**

In the last 20 years, experimentation on the presence of common spaces distributed throughout the height of residential buildings (and not only at the lower levels) has been more directed at particular types of housing. On the one hand, referring to the type of families that will inhabit these complexes (e.g., the *Baugruppen* in Berlin or other forms of cooperative living), which are generally chosen before the buildings are constructed, imagining together with the designers new "ways of living." On the other hand, by involving certain categories of users who share specific needs and inhabit these structures for a specific time (temporary collective housing). In particular, we are thinking of student residences and specific residences for the

elderly. In these facilities some common functions are necessarily shared among all inhabitants (laundries, garbage disposal, gymnasium, bar, study rooms, outpatient clinics, etc.). Others may be shared in a single environment for the whole building (cafeteria, library, common rooms/living rooms), or they may be located "on the floor," in several smaller rooms; or again, in intermediate situations, they may serve two or three levels of the building. In any case, the presence of functions that promote sociability and encounters on the upper levels of the building mitigates that detachment from the urban ground that seemed to have cut off any "urban" type of relationship. Obviously, we cannot speak of "public spaces at height" because these spaces are not properly public but simply common to the residents of that particular structure. On the difference between public, private and common much has been written in the field of urban studies. It is clear that urban space is based on very specific characteristics: anonymity, the possibility of encounters or unplanned stops, an albeit small component of risk, etc. But as Jane Jacobs teaches us, there is also a natural surveillance (the eyes of the street) and spontaneous discretion that characterizes relationships between acquaintances.

And to achieve this, one cannot ignore the "need for concentration" that, since the early 1960s, in an almost heretical but agreeable way, Jane Jacobs suggested as an essential precondition for having rich, diverse, mixed-use cities (Jacobs 1961). On the contrary, the common declines so many different situations that lie between the fully public dimension and the private condition of housing. Reactions to contagion during the global pandemic, especially in the lockdown phases, have revived this idea, shifting, in a non-painful way, some actions and practices from the public to the common.

In public space, the citizen, relating to the physical space and the local community, expresses their way of inhabiting the city. At the moment when a completely free and uncontrolled use of space is precluded, public space loses attractiveness in favor of the common, which is based instead on the activation of spaces with limited access for certain groups of inhabitants, places of sharing, therefore, but also of exclusion. At the same time, also thanks to the spread of remote work that the pandemic has rapidly extended, the dimension of the public tends to translocate some functions into the private. Although these two processes, already in place even before the pandemic, but accelerated by it, have contributed to exacerbating the loss of the public dimension of urban space. Nevertheless, they have also brought within the collective housing, especially when it is developed in height, vital spaces of service, meeting and sociability, often modifying its typological and distributive rigidities in innovative ways.

Let us then consider two recent special housing projects carried out in Spain: the first, 118 Apartments for Young People in Coslada, near Madrid (2013), is an example of social housing; the second, Julia tower in Barcelona (2009 - 2011), is a residence for the elderly.

In the Coslada building, designed by Amann Cánovas & Maruri, without erasing the achievements related to health-

fulness and distributive rationality introduced by the Modern Movement, an attempt is made to incorporate the complexity and functional richness of the pre-industrial city into the architecture of the dwelling. The project is based on collective space, an intermediate space between the all-public and private dimensions. In Coslada, the low plaza is completely open to the city, and the high plaza - the collective space on the fourth level - is accessible from the offices and residential towers and from the low plaza via flights of stairs that have a door (Figure.6). This collective space can be used by the citizenry in the same way as a park or public villa. The building, a public initiative with an extremely low construction price (435€/sqm), aims to provide housing in an area that is developing fast and where affordable housing for young people is scarce. In this residential development, 70 percent of the 118 units are for rent, and the rest are for sale. The lower plaza is connected by a suspended staircase and elevator with a second plaza that, rising ten meters above the first, connects the four towers and separates commercial and office uses from residential areas. The upper public plaza, partly covered, is the heart of the project. All communication routes are connected to this equipped space that becomes an area for leisure and community socialization, a common space at the service of the city. (Amann, Cánovas, Maruri 2015).

In the smaller 40-square-meter apartments, the opposite is reasoned: privacy is provided by a continuous system of closets to the outside and a core of bathrooms and kitchens on the side of the main access corridor, which insulates from noise and centralizes technical services. The basic type of apartment is configured as an open space separated by large sliding doors. All apartments have a seven-square-meter terrace protected from the outside, so it can be used year-round.

In the Julia tower in Barcelona, designed by Pau Vidal, Sergi Pons, and Ricard Galiana, a 17-story sheltered housing tower for the elderly, the search for common spaces is distributed along the entire height of the building, which is divided into three distinct communities (Figure.7). Each of them has at its disposal a large double-height common space, used by the residents for their common activities and clearly evident in the building's facade. The tower forms a landmark and is also equipped with general services (maintenance and cleaning) and social support for elders. The idea is for the building to be related to the urban context, but at the same time to be equipped with communal spaces, capable of triggering interaction among the residents and with the inhabitants of the city; social supports related to health aspects and user monitoring; activities, such as arts and crafts workshops, cinema, computing and memory workshops; general services.

### **Death and life of the multilevel city**

The idea of the vertically developed city descends from Italian futurism (Sant'Elia) and constitutes a model to be utopically aimed at all architects of early modernity, also founding its fortune on a rich tradition of cultural and artistic contributions, consider for example the film *Metropolis* by Fritz Lang (1927).

In addition to the already indicated needs for proximity (be-

tween buildings, activities and people) and for the effectiveness of connections at height only if they are structured "in a network" and in the presence of an albeit "delimited" sociality, an issue that has emerged in recent years, even in the city that develops at height, is that of vegetation presence.

The level of "pulverization" of urban areas on the territory, the awareness of environmental and climate crises, loss of biodiversity and global warming, and the need to safeguard natural areas in the face of the raging population growth and the consequent land consumption, have led in recent decades to the affirmation of a sustainability paradigm based on the high-density / eco-cities pair. This new alliance between urban density and nature determines new and experimental forms of living, both in the compact city (Vertical Garden House by Ryue Nishizawa in Tokyo, 2011), and in the suburban sphere (Mountain Dwellings by BIG /JDS Architects in Copenhagen, 2008), also recovering the utopian-ecological paradigm of the 1960s and 1970s, which is back today as relevant as ever. Not only in ordinary or social housing interventions, but also in projects referring to high-density but luxury living: e.g., Stefano Boeri's Bosco verticale tower in Milan (2014); Big's "hybridized" courtyard with a highrise building (courtscraper, skyscraper + courtyard) in Manhattan (2016); OMA and Ole Scheeren's The Interlace in Singapore (2013), in which the isolated tower model is replaced with a complex system of interconnected blocks 6 stories high and stacked to form courtyards, common spaces, gardens, and rooftop terraces both public and private.

Even the issue of housing emergency was recently declined in height, with the occupation/self-construction intervention of the David Tower, an unfinished 45-story skyscraper in the center of the Venezuelan capital Caracas. Originally intended to become the headquarters of the financial group Confinanzas and Banco Metropolitano, its construction was halted in 1994. Since 1995 (until its eviction in 2014) the building began to be occupied and "reconstructed" by local residents. The structure has become a kind of "vertical slum" whose vitality is sustained by the co-presence of residences (more than 750 households), resident services, gyms, stores and informal medical offices, etc., which give rise to a vertical informal community (Brillembourg, Klumpner 2013). For these reasons, the "reconversion" of the building was awarded the Golden Lion for Architecture in 2012 by the jury of the Venice Biennale, as an emblematic example of collective and informal living in relation to the theme of the exhibition directed by David Chipperfield, which was precisely the Common Ground<sup>2</sup>.

The spontaneous and providential use of condominium terraces during the lockdown took us back to the rooftop of Le Corbusier's *unité d'habitation* in Marseille, to the idea of autonomy of the living machine in which social activities and neighborhood functions all coexist in the same architecture. But once

we return to living freely in urban space, what are today's compact, high-density housing solutions as alternatives to isolation in the territory of modernist living machines?

The first looks to the past, the model of the European city, and the present in the reinvention of the urban block through the experiments of recent decades on social housing in Europe (Reale 2012), and more recently, also in the United States. This model, again starting from Jane Jacobs' idea of privileging a high-density urban fabric along with the "need for small blocks" (Jacobs 1961, 178), leads to the revaluation of the direct street/housing relationship and the courtyard-garden, not necessarily enclosed on the four sides of the perimeter. This is the soft city model (Dim 2019) in which medium-rise blocks (between 5 to 12 floors) are preferable to high-rise buildings (13 floors or above) and skyscrapers (over 40 floors). In the soft city, medium-rise blocks are the key to simultaneously providing high density and human scale, better connecting people with the urban ground and each other, adapting the city's fabric to our evolving needs, and nurturing the relationships that indulge the pleasures of daily life.

Instead, the second contemporary alternative is contained in the revival of the multilevel city model. It is a choice that certainly reconnects with the architectural thinking of the second modernity, thinking of the idea of "visual groups" developed by Bakema with the open society proposal in the 1960s (Bakema 2018), but which then arrives, as we have seen above, at the need to provide for common spaces and shared actions throughout the development of the building. These collective spaces, which are also understood as internal porosities of the architectural organism, conceived as a real urban infrastructure, and which almost always arise from the experiments on special collective housing, also question the typological layout of the high-rise building, thus finding ways to experiment with new ways of living. There are many interesting examples realized recently, from projects in France by Sophie Delay working on spatial and typological flexibility, to Berlin realizations by Heide & von Beckerath focused on cooperative living and the presence of activities open to the city, to "cluster housing" experiments, such as the Haus A, a project in Zurich by Duplex Architekten (2017). The cluster housing model, which refers to the Smithsons' urban model, is slowly spreading across North Central Europe, definitively challenging the pattern of the bourgeois house. The apartments in Haus A can accommodate 10 to 12 people per apartment, and the living and kitchen areas, freely arranged on the flat, are generously sized and form a common connective within which private cores with bedrooms and bathrooms "float."

So turning back to the questions we were asking at the beginning of this text, we can, at this point, say that a skyscraper set on equity and social justice can only take the spontaneous strength of informal associations as its inspiration as well. This, in addition to fostering relationships between people and the variety of spaces, easily leads the design of the residence back to the domestic space of the home and moves us forever away from the modern idea of the machine city.

---

<sup>2</sup>Torre David gran horizonte by Urban Think Tank, Justin McGuirk, Alfredo Brillembourg and Hubert Klumpner with photographer Iwan Baan is a project to reuse the existing structure from observing the organization that the community has demonstrated, without receiving government subsidies, creating an urban community within the city in just eight years.

## References

Amann, A., Cánovas A., Maruri N. (2015). *Vivienda colectiva 2. Amann Cánovas Maruri*. Temas de Arquitectura n.18/2015.

Bakema, J.B. (2018). *Towards an Architecture for Society*. In: Van Es, E., ed (2018). Van den Broek & Bakema. Vigorous protagonists of a functionalist architecture at the TU Delft. Delft: TU Delft Open.

Benjamin, W. (2000). *I «passages» di Parigi*. Torino: Einaudi

Brillembourg A., Klumpner, H., eds (2013), *Torre David: Informal Vertical Communities*. Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2013.

Frampton, J., Solomon A., Wong, C. (2012). *Cities Without Ground: A Hong Kong Guidebook*. San Francisco: Oro Editions.

Gropius, W. (1962). *Scope of total architecture*. New York, NY: Collier Books.

Jacobs J. (1961). *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York, NY: Random House.

Reale, L., ed (2012). *La città compatta. Sperimentazioni contemporanee sull'isolato urbano europeo*. Roma: Gangemi.

Reale, L. (2015). *La Residenza collettiva*. Napoli: SEI

Rodwin, L., Hollister, R. M., eds (1984). *Cities of the Mind. Images and Themes of the City in the Social Sciences*. New York, NY: Springer.

Secchi, B. (2013). *La città dei ricchi e la città dei poveri*. Bari: 2013

Smithson, A., Smithson, P. (1967). *Urban structuring: studies of Alison & Peter Smithson*. London: Studio Vista.

Smithson, A., Smithson, P. (2002). *The Charged Void: Architecture*. London: The Monacelli Press.

Smithson, A., Smithson, P. (2004). *The Charged Void: Urbanism*. London: The Monacelli Press.

Sennett, R. (2018). *Costruire e abitare. Etica per la città*. Milano: Feltrinelli.

Sim, D. (2019). *Soft city. Building density for everydaylife*. Washington DC: Island Press.

Wai S., Wan S. (2007). *The Role of the Skywalk System in the Development of Hong Kong's Central Business District*, paper

presented at the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers, San Francisco, California, April 17-21, 2007

## Webliography

Lévy, J. (2013), *Urbanity/ies*, a movie designed and directed by Jacques Lévy, Chôros.  
<https://vimeo.com/84537407>



Njohur nga MASH, Ministria e Arsimit dhe Shkencës  
Vendim Nr. 153, Dt.08.10.2010

supported by



#### Standards for article publication on the periodical journal Forum A+P:

- Not more than 8 pages, Times New Roman 12, single space;
- Title, Times New Roman 14, Bold
- Subtitle, Times New Roman 12, Bold
- Author, (name-surname, capital, Times new roman, 10
- Abstract and full-text in English language Times New Roman 10 (maximum 10 lines)
- CV of author/authors (5-10 rows)
- Photo of author (passport format)
- Literature (publications and websites), refer APA referencing systems
- Reference (footnote), Times New Roman 8, Italic
- Illustrations in .jpeg, .tiff format at 300 dpi with permission from the original authors.
- Certificate of proof-reading when submitting the final text.

Editor will select upon your priority  
*\* The articles will be selected by the board.*

#### Standardet për publikim artikulli në periodikun shkencor Forum A+P:

- Jo më shumë se 8 faqe A4, Times New Roman 12, single space
- Titulli, Times New Roman 14, Bold
- Nëntitulli, Times New Roman 12, Bold
- Autori, (emër-mbiemër, Times New Roman, 10)
- Abstrakt dhe artikulli është në gjuhën angleze Times New Roman 10 (maksimumi 10 rreshta)
- CV e autorit/autorëve (5-10 rreshta)
- Fotoportret i autorit (format pasaporte)
- Literaturë (publikime dhe website), referuar APA referencing system
- Referimet (footnote), Times New Roman 8, Italic
- Ilustrimet në formatin .jpeg, .tiff, 300 dpi me leje të autorëve
- Vërtetim i proof-reading për dorëzimin e tekstit perfundimtar.

Botuesit do të zgjedhin në bazë të prioritetit.  
*\* Artikujt shqyrtohen dhe zgjidhen nga bordi redaksional.*