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Diversecitysm: Matching Vitruvius's De Architectura and the Jonasian Ecological Imperative

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ABSTRACT

Vitruvius's *De Architectura* heritage is an appropriate conceptual foundation for future urbanistic and architectonic scenarios in which the most varied human relationships will take place. Here his triad keywords are re-interpreted: **FIRMITAS – NATURE (matter)**: we must use regenerable and recyclable biomaterials (of plant origin to store CO₂) whose production and entire lifecycle management don't create environmental or social imbalances. **UTILITAS – ECONOMY (form - function)**: when building *ex novo* ("form follows function") or reusing buildings or neighborhoods, (functions fit forms), we must avoid waste of energy and materials but also of existing volumes and unbuilt surfaces, which are valuable for the WEF Nexus. **VENUSTAS – SOCIETY (project = idea + value)**: we must understand, interpret, lead and communicate the quality of human relationships and their respectful, supportive and sustainable correlation with the Earth. Similarly, Vitruvius's *Venustas* (relative of Ciceronian *Dignitas*) is the harmony both among the individual parts and between themselves and their context, using the Vitruvian man inscribed in a circle and a square as the minimum measurement unit in the balance between the (global) divine dimension and the (local) earthly dimension. Nowadays [following H. Jonas] this harmony is characterized as between freedom and responsibility of individual actions (aesthetic *signified*) and "the consequences on the permanence of authentic human life on earth" (ethical *signifier*). *Venustas* cannot be measured in terms of flat standardization, subjective style or sterile design as an end in itself, but rather on the basis of the satisfaction of working, political, relational needs and their respect for the environment where they develop themselves, *leaving no one behind*, causing *zero waste* and pollution and at least *doing no significant harm* to the Earth and its inhabitants, particularly future ones. Nowadays *Venustas* adheres to the principles of ethics, equity, ecology and democratic social distribution of benefits and burdens, represented by the 17 SDGs of the UN Agenda 2030.

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Introduction

Any strategic and forward-looking vision must be based on a conscious and prudent evaluation of past experience: «*Based on the past / the present prudently acts / so as not to spoil future action*»¹ is the motto painted in Tiziano's *Allegory of Prudence*, which echoes Dante's words: «*it is convenient therefore to be prudent, that is, wise: and to this being is required good memory of past things seen, and good knowledge of present things, and good foresight of future things*» [1].

Architecture, science that unites and synthesizes the experiences, techniques, crafts and arts of shaping the spaces of human relations and actions, is exactly that: a door, a bridge, a road connecting past and future. A future whose perspectives since 1972 (Stockholm Conference & *The Limits to Growth* release [2]) have been increasingly darkened by over-exploitation of the planet's resources, coupled with accelerating population growth, biosphere pollution, and anthropogenic climate change. Having ignored that warning has certainly not erased the urgency of action; on the contrary, this has been hastened by the recent pandemic and worsening of geopolitical tensions that amplify existing inequalities and foster bloody conflicts and forced migrations. We are experiencing apocalyptic landscapes and situations with devastating effects on the survival of humanity: this requires, here and now, radical course corrections and definitive commitments that are not easy or free from consequences, but that are also no longer postponable; and it involves us Architects at the forefront, called upon to be protagonists, if not standard bearers, of the transition (or translation?), on account of the etymology of the term ἀρχιτέκτων (the first or the guide of technicians/experts) and to be at the same time scientists and artists, in both cases keen observers of the existing world and imaginative creators of the forms and identities of society.

Venustas & Dignitas

A look at the heritage of our past can clarify the horizon and allow us to identify appropriate solutions. The traditional triad *firmitas*, *utilitas* and *venustas* proposed by Vitruvius is a good starting point, if reinterpreted from a modern perspective: «*All these buildings must have requirements of solidity, utility and beauty. They will have solidity when the foundations, built of materials chosen with care and without avarice, will rest deeply and firmly on the ground beneath; utility arises from a judicious distribution of the parts, so that their purposes be duly answered, and that each have its proper situation; beauty, finally, is produced by the pleasing appearance of the whole, and by the dimensions of all the parts being duly proportioned to each other by the judicious calculation of symmetries*» [3].

FIRMITAS (matter) NATURE: stability or durability translates into and imposes the sustainability of building: to select biomaterials (preferably of plant origin due to their ability to store CO₂), whose production and management during the entire life cycle does not create environmental or social imbalances (without *avarice* towards planet Earth and its inhabitants); to rely on the measurable scientific parameters of Life Cycle Assessment, grey energy, etc. to avoid or minimize the consumption of non-renewable or slowly regenerable resources, emissions of pollutants and climate-altering substances, etc.

UTILITAS (form + function) ECONOMY: it is the result of the effective and efficient combination of form and function, whether building *ex novo* from scratch (*form follows function*) or reusing what is already built (functions fit forms); leaving aside claims of primogeniture and pre-eminence between one and the other, it has become essential to avoid waste of energies, resources, materials but also of existing volumes and unbuilt surfaces, which are valuable for the WEF Nexus.

¹ EX PRAETERITO / PRAESENS PRVDENTER AGIT / NI FVTVRA(M) ACTIONE(M) DETVRPET.

VENUSTAS (project = idea + values) SOCIETY: Vitruvius *venustas* (from *Venus*, goddess of Beauty and Love) is NOT based on personal taste and perception, or worse, on transient or ephemeral stylistic languages dictated by the ideology conventions or generalist and consumist fashion, or worse than ever, corresponding to that ostentatious luxury that only the wealthy classes can afford. It is no mere coincidence that in his treatise Vitruvius prefers to use the more usual term *pulchritudo* to characterize the variety of private buildings.

Instead, with *venustas* he identifies a concept of beauty based on the harmony and proportionality of the individual parts with each other and between them and the wholeness of the ensemble, consistent with the urban and natural context and the religious, administrative, or social function of the work (the material and/or spatial elements of the building, the surrounding buildings, the city, the environmental context, the State).

To explain this, Vitruvius invokes categories such as *symmetria* and *ἀναλογία* (proportion), *statio* (concordance of the architectural structure with the place, later called *genius loci*), and *decor*, which consists of «*the beautiful appearance of a defect-free work, whose parts respond to a precise calculation achieved by respecting custom and nature*».

It is useful to recall that Cicero in *De Officiis* [4], a treatise on practical ethics related to sociopolitical action, designed to transmit the ideals of the traditional morality and contribute to philosophical learning and political education, states that *venustas* is the feminine version of *dignitas*, and identifies it with the grace that arises from *harmony* and *proportion*, and therefore donates joy and satisfaction. In this he echoes the Greek concept of *καλοκαγαθία*, which derives from the fusion of the two words beautiful and good and indicates the ideal of physical and moral perfection (of virtue and justice) that each person should always pursue in her or his life.

Both *decor* and *dignitas* come from the verb *decēre*, with the meaning of being suitable, adequate, convenient of acts with respect to and in relation to a higher entity. *Dignitas* embodies a value (moral, social, intellectual, spiritual) that inspires esteem, admiration, respect and emulation, and for this reason it is clothed with distinction, superiority, prestige, authority, excellence. For Sallust, 'worthy' is also synonymous with 'weighted, measured, balanced, fair,' e.g. when combined with worthy punishment, precisely to indicate the sense of balance and proportion that should be employed in judging. In Ciceronian oration, *dignitas* often refers to the virtues of the politician, who is respectable because he possesses *aequitas*, *clementia*, *fides*, *pietas*, *sapientia*.

Firmitas and *utilitas* today combine into a further binomial: sustainability and resilience (achieving a new equilibrium after a critical event), key concepts for the circularity of architecture, which in designing and implementing at any scale must adopt the logic of REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE. It is therefore essential to resume the customs of the past: reuse the existing as much as possible and, when essential, demolish selectively, do not consider the material at the end of its life cycle as waste but as a resource; build the new having clear in mind from the beginning what to do with materials and volumes at the end of their life (ecodesign, design for disassembly, etc.). The form-function relationship, from an ancient sustainable binomial strictly linked to local materials, techniques, know-how, values and customs, today offers too identical solutions for every territorial context, based on the wide use of technologies and systems as the only answer to the criteria of aesthetic expression, comfort and habitability of buildings: a monotonous architecture, almost indifferent and incapable of establishing an authentic connection with the history, values and nature of the place that intervenes to modify and create.

United (into a triadic whole) to *venustas*, they impose the responsibility to take care and protect the permanence of both the uniqueness of places (neighborhood, city, territory, planet) and the dignity of the current and future communities dwelling in it, forming a systemic, balanced and organic entity on which to operate with grace, harmony, and respect for all historical, environmental, economic, social and ethical value components, in the widest possible sense of *genius loci*: an architecture that is beautiful because it is ontologically good, capable in turn of conferring well-being and dignity to the

collectivity and of directing it to honest and virtuous conducts and to respectful and balanced correlations with its host environment.

Common Good & Common Action

In the Middle Ages the reference of *venustas* - *dignitas* shifted from the idealization of the Roman Empire or the Republic of Rome to the concept of the **Common Good**, masterfully frescoed by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in 1338-39 in the Public Palace of Siena.

Theorized by Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas among others, the Common Good "is the principle that forms human society and the goal toward which the society and every right must strive" [5] for the pursuit of a community's welfare; based on the concordant observance of laws to ensure social security and economic prosperity, it contrasts the individual good of the despot who imposes with oppression and violence the satisfaction of his own particular interests and those of his own faction, depredating the community and sowing devastation and isolation, where the common good allows the building of relationships and spheres that facilitate, accommodate and guard them with care.

The concept of *venustas* offered by Vitruvius provides the horizon of the beautiful and the common good to a society through its architectural, urban and territorial implementation. In other words, beauty is not an ornament but a way of salvation and at the same time a moral category: it is the *common good* made visible and concrete.

The word 'common' in all Neo-Latin languages means what is NOT possessed by an individual; it begins where the private or the particular property ends. The etymology comes from *cum munus*, in the dual social meaning of *officium* (office, position, employment, honor but also duty, burden) and *donum* (gift). *Munus* is the obligation one has to another or to the community that solicits and imposes appropriate disobligation; it is gratitude that demands new donation. *Munificus* (munificent) is one who manifests his grace (his rendering grace) by returning what he cannot keep completely for himself. And what he no longer fully owns [6]. What prevails in *munus* is thus reciprocity or mutuality, "a giving without losing and a receiving without taking away" [7].

It follows that a *communitas* is the totality of people who responsibly share not only material and immaterial goods (the *commons*) but above all an obligation and a duty, a pledge, since they are gifts to be guarded and returned with gratitude to others.

The proof by absurdity is provided by the COMMON - IMMUNE dichotomy: none of us can claim to be immune from such duty or necessity, except by showing ingratitude and self-excluding ourselves from human society (easy here to play with the term private = excluded).

The word communication derives from *communis actio*: it is not a static or passive process but a movement that actively involves stakeholders and takes effect when the expression is understood and becomes a shared heritage for the construction of a common discussion, knowledge, culture, and finally action. Communication, in the sense of offering a gift, leads the person who receives it to feel an obligation to return the attention received. A kind of barter, an exchange of mutual interest, the sharing of socially useful values.

The **city**, too, is an example of *communis actio* that arises from voluntary and supportive collaboration to realize desires and aspirations and to satisfy needs and projections that cannot be fulfilled individually such as those of safety, care, and quality of life, allocating collective resources for the purpose to build a project of citizenship (and not just urban planning) on a defined portion of territory reorganized by humans and thus taken away but not exempted from the rules of Nature. The city is the concrete and dynamic form of the community that lives in it. It has always been the place of encounter and exchange that is never predetermined: it is therefore the environment in which negotiation, innovation and creative transformation, but also the unexpected, and the experience that arises from trial and error, develop. Its streets and squares are the theater of sociality (made up of welcome, respect, trust, solidarity and responsibility towards the Other), where differences are benefit and currency of exchange. It is school and gymnasium of civic living in which the community trains

and keeps in shape its bonds and belonging, preserves and renews historical memory, and protects the rights of all constituents, including those to participation, knowledge, happiness and beauty.

Man & Ideal City

1452 – *De Re Aedificatoria* by L.B. Alberti, who replaces the triad formulated by Vitruvius, with *numerus* – number, as the geometric root, *finitio* – definition, as the certainty of form, *collocatio* – collocation, as the convenience or concordance between different parts «which, in the end, render an overall unity of the architectural organism identical to that of a living organism; that is, an expression of the rational cosmos unity governed by the universal laws of harmony» [8]. Beauty is agreement and harmony between the parts in such a way that it is not possible to add, remove and change anything without compromising the whole: «as in the animate being each member accords with the others, so in the building each part must accord with the others [...]. And in conforming the parts, the simplicity of nature is the example to follow».

1461-64 – *Sforzinda*, ideal city in Philarete's architectural treatise, in which all geometric measures and figures are derived from man.

1478-90 – The *Treatise on Architecture* by Francesco di Giorgio Martini, who conceives the built environment as a biological organism: the evocative plan of an anthropomorphic fortified city in the Codex Saluzziano [9] places the lordly stronghold in the place of the head, the church in the breast and the main square around the navel.

1480-90 – the three painted panels of *The Ideal City*, theatrical architectural backdrops governed by perfect proportions that draw a city in which buildings are placed at regular, predetermined intervals of space on a geometric chessboard floor with rigid, absolute precision. Prominent in the center is the centrally planted building which, by closing on itself, leaving an ideal and universal emptiness outside, lends itself well to representing the philosophical concept of utopia. With obvious overpowering formalism, in wanting to be on a human scale the very man is made disappear from the representation.

1490 – *The Vitruvian Man* by Leonardo da Vinci. Revisiting the work of Vitruvius, he draws a new triad: Man (measure of all things and mirror of the universe), the circle (Eden, the perfection of Heaven, the macrocosm) and the square (the earthly world, the microcosm). Proportion is nothing more than the ability to measure out, according to a fixed module, the individual parts of a work and the ensemble as a whole; just as a well-formed human body, the beautiful building must be proportionate in size and decorum to dialogue with the city and the land.

1516 – *Utopia* by Thomas More. Taking up Plato's *Republic*, it expresses the ideal of a perfect society based on justice and equality, where culture dominates and regulates men's lives: social contrasts are resolved at the beginning, thanks to an innovative system of political organization: private property is abolished, everyone thinks of the common good, and all goods are common. The principle (revolutionary for the time) of freedom of speech and thought and, above all, religious tolerance is in place. People produce only for consumption and not for the market. Inhabitants spend their leisure time reading classics and taking up music, astronomy and geometry. The city is planned in such a way that all buildings are constructed equally.

1567-1593 – *Nicosia* (Cyprus) and *Palmanova* (Italy), real star-shaped cities designed by Giulio Savorgnan.

1602 – *The City of the Sun* by Tommaso Campanella. Another work that takes from Plato's *Republic* the rejection of private property and the commonality of goods: citizens, separated from their families from an early age, are raised together, eliminating the link of lineage with their parents. They have a common canteen, wear the same clothes, receive the same education and have equal opportunities; «However, the community makes them all rich and poor: rich, because they have and possess everything; poor, because they do not attach themselves to serving things, but everything is of use to them».

1624 – *The New Atlantis* by Francis Bacon. Utopian writing describing an ideal happy society that through reason dominates nature; unlike the mythical Atlantis as narrated by Plato in the *Crizia*, Bacon places at the command not the useless knowledge of philosophers, but the practical knowledge of scientists, capable of transforming reality and ensuring a better life for humanity.

1948-55 – *Le Modulor* by Le Corbusier. Searching in the past for universal and eternal aesthetic and mathematical rules, Modernism pursues a new interpretation of the classical style capable of bestowing absolute order and harmony: the rejection of ornament (seen as a luxury available only to the rich classes), the exaltation of simplicity and the alignment of form with structure and industrial standardization responds to the social commitment to allow everyone to enjoy the benefits of the new and everlasting architecture of the International Style. In order to overcome the WW2 atrocities, Le Corbusier recovers the human dimension in architecture to make it rise to the dignity of a unified and resolving rule: "To formulate answers to the formidable problems raised by our time and concerning the equipment of our society there is only one acceptable criteria, which will lead every problem back to its true foundations: this criterion is the man." LC combines the myth of Vitruvian man with Fibonacci's golden ratio, but naively slips into an excess of idealism and abstraction, so that the model is ill-suited to the variety of human stature and living habits. Apparently, he himself, realizing that the success of one of his projects was being undermined by the dogmatic application of the Modulor, shouted «*I don't give a damn! When it doesn't go, you shouldn't apply it*»!

Humanism, a cultural movement that arose in Italy in the late 14th century thanks to the rediscovery of classical works (including Plato, Vitruvius and Cicero), ascribed confidence and dignity to Man as the center of the universe and the creator of his own 'historical action', a *topos* separate and distinct from Nature. The theoretical and graphic works of this time are based on similar features: the commonality of goods, justice, equality, the ability of the ruling class to pursue the society common good through scientific or philosophical reason chosen as ideal higher laws (whose rigidity and unnaturalness, however, often collides with the individual freedoms they sought to emancipate), the difficult combination of geometry and the proportions of the human body elevated to a philosophical principle to regulate the built (the few concrete realizations of urban space) and the abstract.

Leonardo's image of the Vitruvian man is the graphic synthesis of the triad ideal man, ideal world, and ideal city-society. Squaring the circle is the never subsided desire to define a harmonious perimeter on a human scale that unites the noble past and the radiant future, permanence and innovation, the angular, restless and square historical action of Man inscribed and bound to the circular slow flow of the Natural world. Pointing, however, to the universality of the human being and not abstracting an ideologized and predefined type figure.

Edgar Morin, supporting the need for a new humanism, reminds us that we must never depart from considering the human being as an individual, as a member of a community, and as an animal species inhabiting a biosphere, and that forgetting even one of these affiliations can only generate monsters [10]: an interpretation as relevant as ever to the Vitruvian triad, which sees the city as an example of an organic body, a set of deep and dynamic relationships between itself (built environment), the territory (physical environment), and its inhabitants (anthropic environment), and not just a set of full and empty spaces within which the *historical action* has just shrunk to confused *agitation*.

Dignity & Universal Rights

In the post-World War II period, the will to react to the 'legal catastrophe' of Nazi-fascism prompted the search for the *dignity* of human beings as a firm foundation and a stronghold for the defense of a fundamental core of inalienable and equal rights for all. The term *dignity* entered explicitly into the articles of the Italian constitution (1947) and the German constitution (1949), not coincidentally the very nations where the demonic Nazi-fascist dictatorships were born, and into international documents, first and foremost the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approved in

1948 by the United Nations General Assembly, which inspired and was succeeded by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union of 2000:

“Whereas recognition of the inherent *dignity* and of the equal and inalienable *rights* of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

“All human beings are born free and equal in *dignity* and *rights*. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

“Human *dignity* is inviolable. It must be respected and protected. Everyone has the *right* to life.”

Corresponding to universal rights is the civic and collective duty of reciprocal action for the care, protection, assistance, custody, and guarantee not only of the individual, but also of the social family and the natural environment, the habitats in which human beings are inscribed (Leonardo's circle and square) and within which they can and must exercise their individual freedom and their historical practical and intellectual action: according to Giulio Regeni [11], this action must be guaranteed by a firm democratic social system capable of supporting (with its *firmitas*) the choices of the citizens.

«Architects, as agents of the transformation of landscapes and cities, have the fundamental role of interpreting the desire to live well and give concrete form to the demands for justice and equity that come from civil society, consistent with the principles of the *common good*, inspiring a forward-looking ethic that senses the imperative to leave future generations an environment and a pattern of cities that are worthy of what we have inherited from past generations» [12].

If human dignity is inviolable, we must concern ourselves with creating spaces and places to live and work that do not offend it, indeed guaranteeing freedom and security. Too many people live in makeshift dwellings, not only in the 3rd world megacities, slums and bidonvilles but also in the degraded peri-urban areas of the most opulent cities, in whose privileged areas are found the sumptuous exclusive residences of the new upper middle class, often designed by archistars [13]. The moral obligation to intervene also allows us to learn from this *architecture of survival* [14], made of discarded materials for a discarded humanity, and to rediscover the ability to create healing beauty even in modesty, simplicity and frugality, to bestow indispensable *dignity* that does not require wealth of money and technical means nor waste of increasingly scarce resources.

A short list:

- The right to health is not only about the wholesomeness of the building or urban environment but is defined by the context of environmental and social relations in which it is placed: for example, the right to personal hygiene is closely linked to the right and availability to use water as a common good, nowadays an increasingly precious resource to be managed wisely and sparingly.
- The right to express one's individual freedom of thought, conscience, religion, sexuality, information, education and instruction (fundamental to shaping an opinion), association, assembly and political demonstration, with the only limit of respecting others' rights.
- The right to accessibility, in the broadest sense of freedom of access to all places and the social relations they host, regardless of any physical and economic frailties and sociocultural and religious identities; its denial means discrimination, marginalization and ghettoization.
- It is an indispensable measure and duty of civility to have adequate public spaces where these rights can be exercised (both, containers and contents, are valuable common goods): streets and squares (ἀγορά agora of the Greek polis), once forms of collective participation, today mostly replaced with shapeless digital places that substitute physical presence and radicalize public debate, transforming participation into cheering, creating neither real common-action nor believable communities; schools, museums, libraries, archives, archaeological sites, to teach, protect and exhibit the works of the past that give meaning and value to the present and a direction towards the future; theatres, sports fields, parks, music halls and cinemas, places of entertainment and more or less busy leisure; buildings of worship, places of spirituality; hospitals, healthcare facilities; offices, factories, sites of work and income. All these structures are essential for quality

of life, which not only enrich but interpret the identity and constitute the bond of a community, and whose absence would determine the socio-economic desertification of the city.

- And above all the right to authentic *venustas* - beauty; to its ability to inspire joy, well-being, collective participation and creativity, in turn a duty towards the community; and to the pursuit of happiness, joyful enjoyment of beauty, pleasure that goes beyond the only vital subsistence (food, health), a principle that is present in philosophical reflection since ancient times, officially codified in 1776 with the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America, and yearly checked with the *World Happiness Report*. A democratic right, that of beauty, today transformed into a duty to consume compulsively under the guidance of persuasive fashion influencers who impose on us a level of false luxury and insecure self-satisfaction, mostly made up of exclusive but falsifiable designer labels, falsifying aesthetic prostheses, debt installments, products that are often useless, irreparable and not very durable, recently brushed with reassuring greenwashing and passed off in last minute sales to everyone at all costs, in super-technological city centers and commercial malls all the same and interchangeable with each other, false copies of *holy grails* for the display of indispensable and momentarily satisfying contentment: the culture of unsustainable excess and annoying waste [15], which in turn, by trying to hide it, generates exploitation, pollution, imbalance, abandonment, unhappiness, ugliness, disharmony and unworthiness.
- Finally, the one that includes all the previous ones: the right of the undefended, the Other par excellence: that of future generations to live with dignity in the world into which they will be born. From this right derives the obligation to protect the biosphere (the most important common good), recognized by the world scientific community (with minimal exceptions), protected by all religions (just for example: Pope Francis with his encyclical *Laudato sii – on care of our common home*) and defended by the nascent climate justice sector.

Categorical Imperative of Jonas's Principle of Responsibility

Technological progress has made Man more dangerous for nature than it once was for him; «the essence of human action has therefore been transformed, and since ethics has to do with action, this also requires a change in ethics». Facing the progressive man-made degradation of the earth's ecosystem, the fractures in society and the terrible contradiction between the worlds of today and tomorrow, Hans Jonas identifies in the *principle of responsibility* the basis of a contemporary ethic which has as its aim not only the survival of human life on Earth, but also its unity and dignity.

By calling man to responsibility towards his fellow men and the natural environment in which he lives, and insisting on the importance of rationality and the ability to make responsible predictions for the future, Jonas provides fruitful conceptual tools for imagining a form of coexistence between men and, between them and nature, much more desirable than the intolerable catastrophes of which we are daily spectators. He establishes a cosmic ethic based on the "duty of fear" with respect to the probable catastrophic outcomes of our actions and on the "courage of responsibility" as necessary step to face and seek a political solution to the present huge problems: overpopulation, exhaustion of natural resources, energy production and environmental decay.

Defining the *principle of responsibility*, Jonas reminds us of the duty to pursue the *Common Good*: an imperative suited to the new type of human action and oriented to the new type of acting subject might run thus: "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life", or, translated negatively: "Act so that the consequences of your action do not destroy the future possibility of such life", or, simply "Do not endanger the conditions of the indefinite survival of humanity on earth", or most generally: "In your present choices, include the future integrity of Man among the objects of your will" [16].

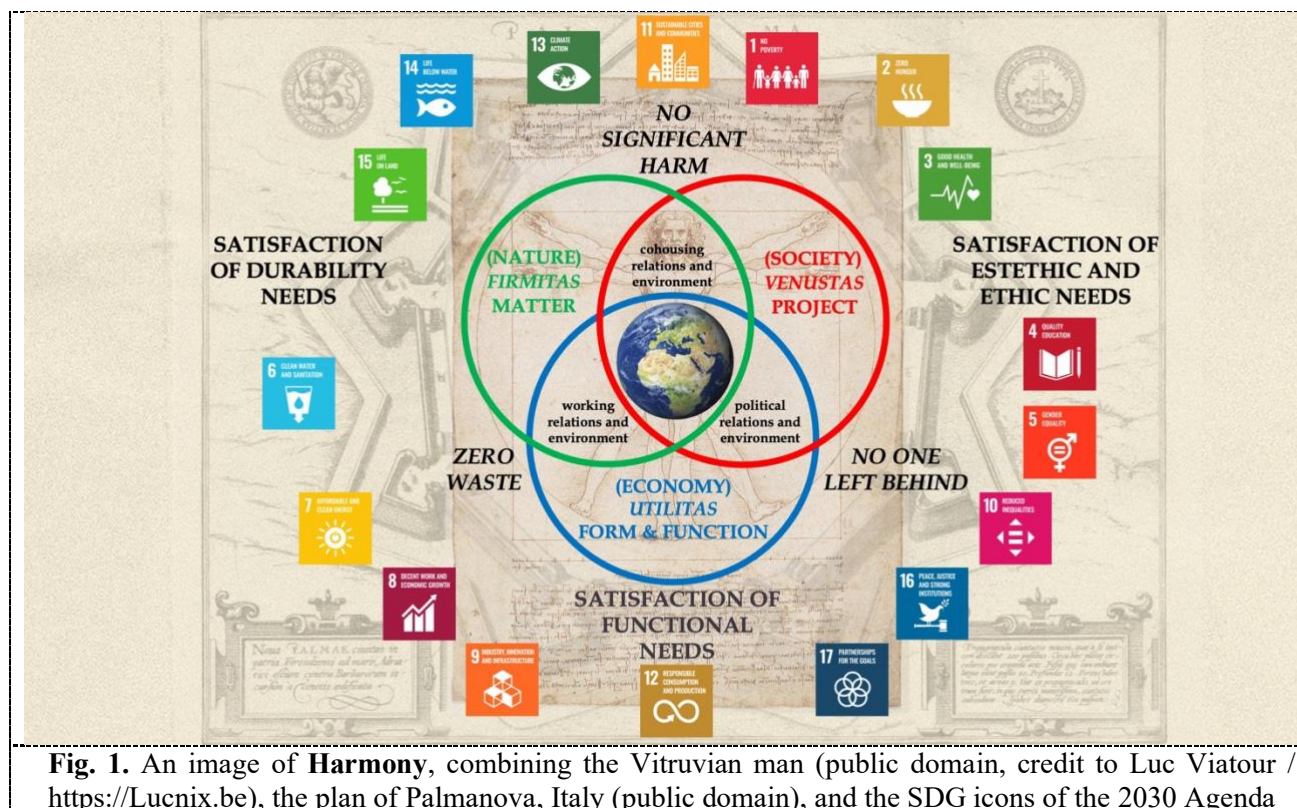


Fig. 1. An image of **Harmony**, combining the Vitruvian man (public domain, credit to Luc Viatour / <https://Lucnix.be>), the plan of Palmanova, Italy (public domain), and the SDG icons of the 2030 Agenda

Agenda, Emergenda, or better Urgenda 2030

On 25 September 2015, 193 United Nations countries signed an action plan that commits them to guarantee a better present and future for our planet and the people who live on it.

It is the **2030 Agenda** for sustainable development, which defines 17 SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) to be achieved by 2030, divided into 169 Targets, which represent a compass to place the world on a sustainable path. The process of changing the development model is monitored through the Goals, Targets and over 240 indicators: with respect to these parameters, each country is periodically evaluated at the UN and by national and international public opinions. The Agenda brings a great innovation: for the first time a clear judgment is expressed on the unsustainability of the current development model, not only on an environmental level, but also on an economic and social level, definitively overcoming the idea that sustainability is solely an environmental issue and affirming an integrated vision of the different dimensions of development.

Is it an unachievable utopia? So it seems: we are at the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda's timeline, but less than 13% of its targets have been achieved. Yet it is the only real possible way to shape our future. And this is the skill, the role and the passion of us Architects, this is what we do: to imagine, project and shape the future ways of living together.

The **UIA** has always been committed to promoting the 2030 Agenda: the 3rd edition of the *Guidebook for the 2030 Agenda* was recently published, full of substantial architecture and urban planning examples that pursue and put into practice the 17 SDGs and show that sustainable solutions are possible. The preface written by UIA President Gonthier states “the architect is challenged to understand the needs of both users and investors and interpret them in the interest of society. The profession does not only have an aesthetic, but also a social, ethical and political responsibility. Good design is not extravagant, but *responsible*. Quality does not imply high cost but care for people and public interests” [17].

In other words, the 2030 Agenda represents a new reference for the Vitruvian triad: *firmitas* and *utilitas* combined in sustainability, that must make *zero waste* and pollution and *no significant harm* to the Earth and its inhabitants (even and particularly the future ones), *venustas* that must adhere to the principles of ethics, equity and the democratic social distribution of benefits and burdens, the pursuit of the *common good* and the *responsibility* towards humanity, *leaving no one behind*.

This is urgent, as we are in full emergency: keeping the *status quo* is not an option.

Evolution of the Venice Biennial Architecture Exhibitions

In 2000 Massimiliano Fuksas entitled the VII Venice Biennale ***Less Aesthetics, More Ethics***, and abandoning the previous approaches, he privileged, rather than the aesthetics of a single project, the search for new ethical responses to face the environmental, social and technological challenges posed by the contemporary city, in particular the megacities of the 21st century, in which the scale and speed of urban transformations have led to heavy pollution and new social tensions and disparities. The theme is also taken up by the X Biennale ***City. Architecture and Society***, edited in 2006 by Richard Burdett.

In 2016 the XV Biennale ***Reporting from the front***, curated by Alejandro Aravena, declines the themes of quality of life and sustainability (interpreted as action against the waste of material and resources, as durability over time and resistance to obsolescence, as use of common sense and use of natural forces rather than contrast between them) in a particularly innovative design of urban spaces (and often renewal of marginalized and degraded places), considering them as a collective value, the enjoyment of which by the individual does not reduce the possibility of use by others, enhancing the identifying values of the communities: legality, health, environment, sociality and culture.

The Italian pavilion, with the exhibition ***Taking care – designing for the common good*** curated by TAMassociati, exhibits concrete cases of architecture at the service of the community, capable of improving the built environment and the quality of life of people in a virtuous circle that sees the common good as a result and as an 'activating principle of social innovation processes' and generator of further material or immaterial common goods, especially in those places where people live in conditions of marginality, social degradation, non-observance of human rights: from the suburbs borders to refugee camps. "When architecture takes care of people, places and resources, it makes the difference. It is part of a collective process in which it is essential to *think* about needs, *meet* with people and *act* in spaces".

In 2018 the XVI Biennial ***Freespace*** curated by Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara aims to represent "the generosity of spirit and the sense of humanity that architecture places at the center of its agenda, and focuses on its ability to offer democratic spaces as a gift to users, unplanned, free for uses not yet defined, as well as on its ability to address the unexpressed desires of the stranger; invites us to re-examine our way of thinking, stimulating new ways of seeing the world and inventing solutions in which architecture provides for the well-being and *dignity* of every inhabitant of this fragile planet; it embraces the freedom to imagine the free space of time and memory, connecting past, present and future, building on the layers of our cultural heritage, linking the archaic and the contemporary." The manifesto ends by quoting a Greek proverb: "A society grows and progresses when the elderly plant trees in whose shade they know they will never sit."

In 2021 Hashim Sarkis in the XVII Biennial ***How will we live together?*** proposes "in a context of sharpening political divisions and growing economic inequalities, to imagine spaces in which we can live generously together: together as human beings who, despite growing individuality, long to connect with each other and with other species through digital and real space; together as new families looking for more diversified and dignified living spaces; together as emerging communities calling for equity, inclusion and spatial identity; together beyond political borders to imagine new geographies of association; together as a planet facing crises that demand global action so that we all continue to live."

The Italian pavilion hosts the exhibition ***Resilient Communities*** curated by Alessandro Melis, suggesting the conceptual and concrete image of the historic, compact and ecological Italian city, as a

model of a living organism to transform the suburbs into communities capable of facing the social and environmental pressure currently underway, exploiting innovative methodologies and interdisciplinary exchange between architecture, botany, agronomy, biology, art and medicine.

In 2023, the XVIII Biennial *The Laboratory of the Future* curated by Lesley Lokko finally puts the spotlight on African culture: "in architecture culture in particular, the dominant voice has historically been a singular and exclusive voice, whose reach and power have ignored vast swathes of humanity – financially, creatively and conceptually – as if listening to and speaking one language. The history of architecture is therefore incomplete. Not wrong, but incomplete. This is why exhibitions are important."

Measure, Limit & Growth

No longer on the rigid scale of an idealized man, but on the ideal scale of all women and men, even the most fragile and those who will come. And above all, tailored to the planet that hosts us. By measuring the reality of the facts scientifically and analytically, objectively and without preconceptions. And letting ourselves be guided by science and the experience of all living organisms.

Therefore, accepting limits and boundaries of our 'only one Earth'. In 1972 *The Limits to Growth* [2] put an end to the myth of unlimited growth, which no organism or biological tissue can afford, except viruses and tumor cells, which end with the annihilation of the host. Unlimited growth is not sustainable in a finite context, only the balance and collective redistribution of benefits and burdens. It is essential to move from Growth Economy to new models of well-being economy and social and environmental balance, being at the service of people and the planet rather than considering them a profit tool: an example is the *Donut economy* proposed by Kate Raworth.

As Amitav Ghosh says, "it is evident that compulsion is what we need in our era. We must keep in check our limitless desires and the idea that freedom means freedom to consume. Rhyme and metric are two essential elements which, although limiting in the use of language, lend themselves to the analysis of reality". And the message of *Jungle Nama* [18] is that humans need constraints to create balance in their world.

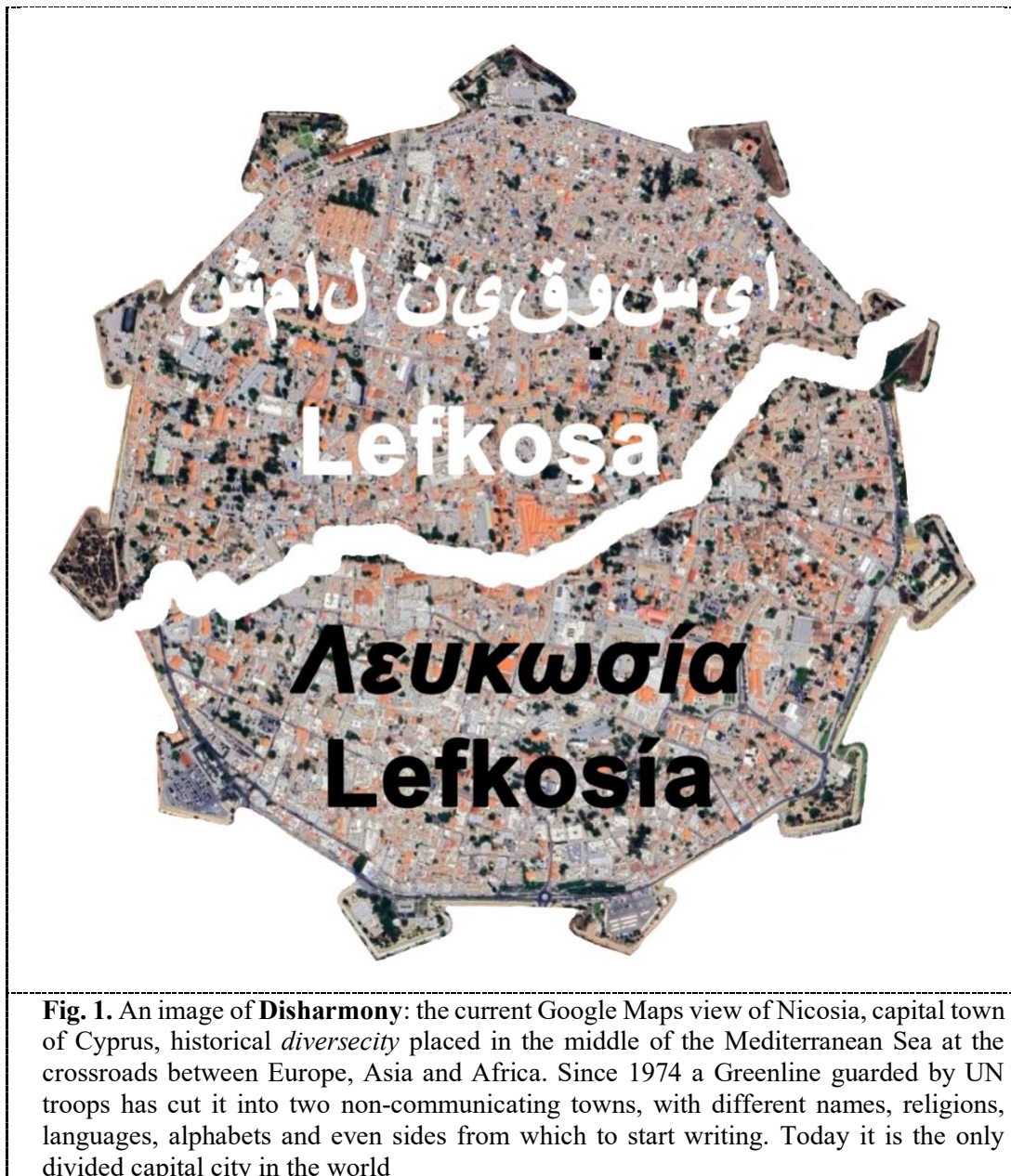
If greed is consuming planetary resources without limit, exchange or compensation, its opposite is managing them as common goods and making them regenerable [19]. Equity and ecological balance, or social and ecological equity: these are the challenges we face; if technology is part of the problem, it is also part of the solution. Very often we have mistaken their intended use, yet technology makes us available tools, experiences and refined measures on which to build solutions, including:

Company ratings and models as ESG reports, B corporations (based on the TBL Triple Bottom Line), Benefit corporations, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or Impact index; Community Interest Companies (CIC) created to benefit the community rather than shareholders.

Sustainability benchmarks as the Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes (DJSI) e the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). The CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive) is a European Union regulation, in force from 5 January 2023, which requires EU companies - including qualifying EU subsidiaries of non-EU companies - to report on environmental impact and social impact of their activities and the business impact of their environmental, social and governance (ESG) efforts and initiatives.

Building products: the LCSA (Life Cycle Sustainable Assessment). fixed in 2011 by UNEP (United Nations Environment Program), the evaluation of embodied energy, the EPD product certification, etc.

Building sustainability certification systems: the English BREEAM, the French HQE, the German DGNB and Passivhaus, the US LEED, the Japanese CASBEE, the Italian CasaClima-Klimahaus and ITACA, etc.



Conclusions

“*What’s the city but people?*” asks Shakespeare [20].

A city is the shape of the community that dwells in it, the embodiment of the *common good*. Until it is safe and sane, it generates relations, common actions and changes that capitalize the social energies of its inhabitants and create a bridge from past to future. Plurality of experiences, cultural identities and sensibilities, different formal languages and aesthetics, far from being a problem, enrich and provide creativity, innovation and development. There is no freedom without responsibility, no rights without duties, no beauty without ethics: these concepts take shape in the relationship with the Other, with those different from us. They don't arise when living alone on a desert island. A city is its opposite.

We Architects are neither immune nor immunized or can afford the luxury to avoid the ethic responsibility, initially stated by the Vitruvian *venustas*, to respect harmony between the parts (any

human gender) and the whole context (their mutual relations and their relationship with the global environment), and most of all, to deserve Humanity. That gift - *donum* of being in the world becomes a duty - *officium* to take care of the planet and makes us *cum munus* people, with the imperative need to act for the *common good* according to Jonas's principle of responsibility.

We, Architects and Citizens, MUST act so that cities and the communities inhabiting them can be wiser while remaining joyful, beautiful but sustainable, adaptive and conservative, welcoming but prudent, followers of ideals and libertarian, accessible but reserved, supportive and honest, dense but peaceful, rich and ecological, rigorous but creative, communicative and capable of common actions, healthy and useful, animated but safe, long-lasting and resilient, coherent but innovative, loyal and determined, lively and livable, industrious and biophilic, careful but carefree, decorous and generous, affordable but dignified, fair and balanced, educational and exciting, humble but suggestive, heterogeneous and open to dialogue, respectful of duties and rights and therefore respected, inclusive of differences but against inequalities, concrete and elastic, happy and fertile with social energies, attentive to the past but open to the future, egregious (*ex gregis*, which stands out from the flock) and aggregating, relaxing but interesting, orderly and munificent, not greedy but reciprocating, passionate and compassionate, not standardized but proudly different, unique and regenerable, green and symbiotic, responsible and visionary, never banal and never mediocre: as Arch. Carlo Scarpa said “*We are not interested in the mediocre, we know the beautiful, we go in search of the sublime*”.

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