

Challenges of the most complex human invention: Editorial of the thematic dossier 'Mid-sized Cities Nowadays and in the Future', Volume I

Our jungles combine ideas, ambitions, cement, bricks, steel and trees. For the first time in the history of mankind, the global population is predominantly urban. It is the City Planet: cities bloom and grow worldwide. There is consensus about the fact that urbanization is one of the most important socio-environmental processes in contemporary times. The significant set of impacts caused by this process at local, regional and global scale is also consensus. In fact, urbanization is one of the most significant threats to the biosphere, and its reversal demands deep changes in urban planning and management processes. In parallel, the growth of cities imposes the challenge of bringing urban-life quality to all; such quality is materialized not only in infrastructures such as schools and hospitals, but also in the access to ecosystem services provided by biodiversity and its landscapes. Thus, cities should be thought of as systemic and additional areas of biological conservation and biophilic enjoyment.

The urbanization process in Brazil has displaced millions of people from rural areas to cities. Approximately 10% of the Brazilian population lived in urban areas in 1890. A few decades later, this scenario was abruptly reversed: nowadays, 85% of Brazilian citizens live in cities. In the first cycle, migrants settled in major cities. Since the mid-1990s, a new urbanization cycle has begun in Brazil, a fact that considerably increased the number of mid-sized cities, whose populations range from 100,000 to 500,000 inhabitants. From 1991 to 2000, the annual growth rate of Brazilian mid-sized cities reached 2.4%, whereas large cities and metropolises grew at the rate of 1.6%. Nowadays, there are 264 mid-sized cities in a universe of 5,570 counties in the country. These cities comprise approximately 25% of the Brazilian population. The demographic criterion adopted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics in order to categorize mid-sized cities in Brazil is the subject of debates and academic studies.

Current Brazilian urbanization trends replicate a global phenomenon. Most of the global urban population increase takes place in mid- and small-sized cities, whose planning and management capacity is often insignificant. In 2007, 52% of the 3.3 billion urban inhabitants lived in cities with less than 500,000 inhabitants. Up to 2025, these cities will absorb approximately half of the expected global urban population growth. In addition, low-income populations will account for the largest part of the global urban population growth in the future.

The articles, essays, the review and interviews published in the first volume of the dossier are inspiring contributions that distinguish nuances and clarify architectural, urbanistic, social, economic, ecological, geographic, political, legal, demographic, landscape, urban mobility, public and cultural health aspects of mid-sized cities.

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