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## CITIES SHAPED BY FOOD: A NEW ARCHITECTONIC AVANT-GARDE

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Since its first appearance on earth, the need for food has always shaped men's life. It does not come as a surprise then, that humans stopped being a nomad species when they finally learnt the fine art of agriculture.



In Palestine, archeologists found the rests of what was probably one of the very fist settlements in human history: Jericho. Founded around the 9.500 b.C., excavations showed that by the early 8.000 b.C. Jericho was hosting around 2-3 thousands inhabitants, organized into a proper community able to build walls and produce art. In 1.500 years, that very small settlement became a town, which could grow and develop for other 5000 years, thanks to the development of the very first agricultural techniques: complex irrigation systems and trace of grains and wheat were found in the archeological site. Eventually, even Jericho had to fall, the increasing population, greed, needs, war, drought and famine finally

destroyed it after six thousands years of existence.

Throughout history cities have been in a codependent relationship with their countryside, and their survival strictly depended on the capacity of the land to produce food: food transportation was extremely complicated and that limited the capacity for cities to expand. The very basic laws of geometry can explain that, as the larger the city grew, the smaller the size of its hinterland became with the inevitable consequence that the latter could no longer feed the former: 15<sup>th</sup> century Bologna was one of the biggest cities of its time with a population of 75.000 people, famine was most certainly much known by its inhabitants, until the black plague decimated its population partially resulting in easier food acces for those that survived.

Up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, food had determined where and how cities were built, but, during the industrial revolution, the appearance of new infrastructures that were able to connect cities at high speed suddenly changed this paradigm: once the first railways started to be built in Europe it was clear that they represented an unprecedented opportunity to distribute food all around cities and countries. The boundaries of urban environment and rural hinterland started to fade and the city sprawl was then unstoppable.

We now live in a world where most population is gathered in big cities, and urbanization trends show us that in the immediate future the percentage of people living in urban areas is destined to grow even more.

Our native environment has become a concrete jungle where the actual natural world has completely been displaced. We live in ever-taller buildings and we are losing our connection to the ground, perceiving it as a remote entity, almost a memory. Even though, we are now used to live in a urban environment (even feeling lost when we are far from it) we still are animals,

defined by animal needs which primary instinct is to feed.

“We are now a urban species, living in a urban habitat [...] and while we may have broken our ties with rural living, we haven't broken ties with our need to eat. [...] Energy conservation will drive us to shorten the global food chain. It all leads us back to the city: cities have resources like land, water, labor and a ready-made market for food production. It actually makes a lot of sense to shorten our food chain by growing food right in the cities where we 'co-producers' live“ [Food and the City - Jennifer Cockrall-King, Prometheus book, 2012]

In this scenario the abundance of squares, rooftops and vertical surfaces in our urban areas is an untapped opportunity for bringing nature and food back to the city.

It is time now for a new architectonic avant-garde, able to collect and express the needs of our society reshaping to its very core the way we perceive the urban environment, able to design buildings and neighborhoods not just for humans but also for plants. A new architecture which is not only respectful of the environment but that promote a new natural setting within the city. In the past 20 years we have seen the number of green facades and sustainable buildings constantly rising, which, luckily, opened the way for always newer experimentations: now, being green seems to be just not enough, we need to go one step further and favor the design of organic buildings capable of providing us with fresh and clean vegetables encouraging food safety and food security within the cities. We may now realize (again) that food is not something that we can take for granted anymore.

Urban farming must then be encouraged on a global scale in order to promote local food communities, shortening the distribution chain, educating people to a new city-based food culture.