NATURALNESS AS A PRE-CONDITION OF SUSTAINABILITY
EXAMPLES IN SPAIN & PORTUGAL

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Portugal and Spain being two Southern European countries have a type of urbanism that follows the Mediterranean and Southern European tradition of compact cities, with quite numerous collective urban spaces: avenues, piazzas, promenades, etc.
Cities and villages are normally dense and with mixed uses.

There are two points we would like to estate in order to get a sustainable environment, we mean a sustainable urban environment.
We have deduced the two points from the present experience of the architectural and urban proposals seen in these countries.

One is the need for urbanity, for the respect of urbanity.

The other, in close relation with the previous one, is the adoption of all those architectural and urban elements that through history have been used in the precise and given context where an action takes place.

In a recent text we published, we referred to a story when we were children at school. Every week we had to take home the book with the qualifications in the different topics: Geography, Grammar, Mathematics, etc. The parents could be punctually informed of the performance of their children. The father or the mother signed the book, and the child took it back to school until next week where the same operation was repeated.

We remember the list of topics, they made a column on the left side of the page, leaving the right side for a column of the marks.

There were two topics that appeared above, in the beginning of the list, on the heading of the page, but separated from the column where all the rest of the topics were listed. These two separated topics (rather categories) were named "Conduct" and "Urbanity".
The parents considered these two as the most relevant of all.
If the child did not get the highest mark on these two, the alarm was set, as if something was going wrong.

They immediately went to talk with the teachers. These two categories were the most highly praised by the parents. Their kids could be not so good in Geography, or History or whatever, but for God's sake they should behave properly.

Conduct and Urbanity were considered basic rules in education for a healthy social life. Children were taught to behave according with the principles and manners established for a good harmony and mutual respect. We will never forget these two categories: Conduct and Urbanity.

The setting of certain rules was considered a basic principle for an education for conviviality in social life. But this was exactly what happened in the urban life, with urban architecture.

If I say it happened, in past time instead of present time, is because it was exactly like that; as it was through decades, and centuries.

It is the increase in the level of consumption, the competition for novelty at any price, inventing and re inventing the wheel every five minutes, what changed that scenario in the last three or four decades.

The breaking of urbanity at the scale that has taken place lately has not brought any good for the individual or the community; quite the contrary.

The homogeneity of urban areas have been heavily eroded, loosing their identity. The solutions proposed, insufficiently tested in time have given a rather poor result. The city has become a real cacophony of objets, has lost harmony, and has abandoned the minimum levels of respect for the public realm, for the street, the squares, etc.

What all this we say has to do in relation with sustainable development ?.

It has in different ways. Sustainability requires consensus, harmony, respect to the environment, identification with the place, endeavours in common, etc.

And what is going on today is just the opposite to the values proclaimed by urbanity.

We all know of the extreme level of adaptability to the environment in vernacular architecture, and how such a state is the result of centuries of empiricism.

We could say an analogous statement for the city. To invent and re invent forms for the sake of novelty is a contribution to the consumption associated with just fashion, including its ever shortening expiring date. Nothing to do with stability, with permanent solutions, or even worse with the serious issues that the urban population in our planet has to face. It is, why not to say it, pure banality.

If urbanity is a value, the acceptance of certain rules is inevitable.

And here we are with the issue of harmony, balance and the question of homogeneous areas.

Without entering into the issue of style, of architectural style, and while remaining at the level of typologies, there will be a great achievement in favour of urbanity.

Having said this, we could go ahead and establish ordinances (the alignments, the height of the different floors, the vertical section of the facade to the street, etc).

And further ahead establishing certain limitations for the type of openings, or the type of materials to be used.
In doing so, we will be acting within the frame of urbanity, therefore, of a common interest and respect for the neighbours.

In other words, for architecture, urbanity will be the formal expression of respect, as it is in social life. And such an attitude does not affect to the personality of every individual, does not reduce his level of freedom, in sum does not mean any kind of diktak, but quite the contrary: People will be able to reasonably predict what is going to happen in their street or district. The rest, the supposed freedom of action, is pure laissez faire for the benefit of a few, who do not give a damm for urbanity, sustainability, or whatever, but under the umbrella of "individual freedom" they just seek their strict personal benefit.

Again, the role of the mass media, and the role of education is really important for inducing all these values that have conformed social life all through history, and that seem to vanish in the last three or four decades.
A great damage is daily produced by the critics who seem to be more interested in defending any novelty, for the sake of being the latest thing, rather than exposing a proper comment on the relevance of the object they are praising. Many have already questioned if all those so called architectural critics have the necessary knowledge, the necessary concern towards society, or the minimum dignity and integrity for the role they do.

Having arrived to this point, we have seen how urbanity eventually means the setting of certain rules and, of course, the respect of those rules.

It is in this sense that we wanted to make the double statement: Need of urbanity, and respect for existing architectural and urban elements (the real constituents of urbanity).

We will show now few images of the present state of his question in our countries, in relation to what we intend to say.

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SPAIN

URBAN PLANS

We have the following examples of new urban plans:

Image 1. -   New District Portico del Sur, Madrid

Image 2.-   Plan Portico del Sur

Image 3.-   New Town of Navalcarnero

These examples and the last one in particular still show the rigid geometries inherited from the Modern Movement principles. The lay out is quite rigid and the architectural typologies derived from that layout will be inevitably very monotonous.

We can see it more evidently in the last example of New Districts:

Image 4.-   New District in Arganda

Image 5.-   Architecture in Arganda 1

Image 6.-   Architecture in Arganda 2.

In general terms these proposals do follow the CEU rules: compactness, mixed uses, existence of urban spaces, etc.

In fact they represent a clear improvement from what we can consider as BAD PLANS:

Image 7.-   New District Parque de Alcorcon

Image 8.-   Cullera

Image 9.-   Ibiza

Image 10.-   What is proposed as Bioclimatic housing

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These images prove that a city of urban quality is not based just on its plan, or on its layout.

The layout has to foresee the architecture that will fill that layout. Urbanism and architecture need to be re-united.

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URBAN ARCHITECTURE

In order to fulfil the idea of URBANITY as we pointed out before, we consider of the greatest relevance the adoption by the new constructions in a given context, of those urban, architectural, constructive and compositional elements that exist in that context, that have generated that context, and that have given the identiry (through generations) to that context.

We will see few good examples in which this attitude is adopted:

IMAGE 11.-   Extension of an existing building in Pamplona

IMAGE 12 -   A cultural club, with the façades following the existing urban landscape in Alicante.

IMAGE 13.-   ""

IMAGE 14.-   Casa Mas

IMAGE 15.-   Casa Mas

IMAGE 16.-   Casa Mas

IMAGE 17.-   The Walls of Laguardia, Northern Spain.

IMAGE 18.-   Housing in an existing building. Extension. Cadiz.

These examples show certain new elements that have to be there: railings, window frames, etc. We can clearly see that these buildings are therefore contemporary buildings. But they fit into the context, they do take into account the place in which they are built.

On the contrary we have clear BAD EXAMPLES such as the following:

IMAGE 19.-   The new headquarters of the Government of the Canary Islands, that literally destroys the beautiful existing urban fabric and ignores the architecture of the place.

IMAGE 20.-   A residence for priests in Plasencia

IMAGE 21.-   A residence for priests in Plasencia

IMAGE 22.-   An office building in Gijón, Asturias.

These projects, and unfortunately, there are many, many more, have fully and completely ignored where they are. The idea of URBANITY has been completely trampled.

And we have a position in a similar line to those examples that we have previously considered as positive, but that still show certain doubts as wether or not to show a supposed "A Modern Attitude",

In order not to fall in such a "terrible" status of "lacking" modernity, the following proposals remain rather short, and rather weak, although the good intentions that they pursue:

IMAGE 23.-   Extension of Orgiva City Hall.

IMAGE 24.-   Extension of Minas de Riotinto City Hall.

IMAGE 25.-   " "

IMAGE 26   New wing in a College in the University of Salamanca

IMAGE 27.   Gentrification of an old street and new housing in Baeza.

IMAGE 28.-   Baeza

These last examples do show a will to fit into a given context. They do rescue that context from a complete decay, and in that way they really give the context new life.

But some details, wether compositional, constructive, or typological, still try emphatically to show a modern standing.

There is a clear inferiorly complex, expressed with that attitude of superiority. The proposals do not trampled the site, but remain short in their good intentions.

PORTUGAL

The need for URBANITY, the need for the city that has always worked so well and now it´s vanished, is also a very actual issue in Portugal as in Spain.

People feel bad in their own cities and those trying to find harmony and URBANITY - and have means to afford it – opted to live at condominiums (ghettos for rich people) or at their country houses.

But this only makes things worse. It doesn't contributes to solve the problems; by the contrary, this attitude makes life in the cities even worse as it increases segregation.

Even at their beautiful country houses, people feel alone - they miss something.

But, if we intend to identify a more characteristic or specific state of things in this matter of **URBANITY** or   of the **SUSTAINABLE CITY**, we should say that Portugal is a country that was quite intact – speaking of it's territory including cities - until the late 60's early 70's when we started to experience real changes in the way of living, with people coming into the big cities – Oporto, Lisbon, Coimbra, etc…, leaving the fields and the small towns and villages – when the industrialization began to assume a more important role in the Portuguese economy.

From those years until now, we can identify 3 major changes in the biggest cities of this country:

> **01 -   ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS AROUND THE EDGE OF THE CITY;**
> **WITH VERY PRECARIOUS CONSTRUCTIONS AND THE LACK OF INFRASTUCTURES ;**

> **02 -   NEW PLANNED NEIGHBOURHOODS IN PERIPHERICAL AREAS ADOPTING THE URBAN TIPOLOGIES OF THE MODERNIST MODELS AND THEORIES;**

> **03 -   DEGRADATION OF THE TOWN CENTRES TRANSFORMING GOOD MIXED USE NEIGHBOURHOODS FULL OF LIFE, INTO DANGEROUS MONOFUNCTIONAL PLACES THAT ONLY LIVE DURING THE WORKING HOURS OF THE DAY**.

Together with these 3 major problems, we have been sufferering the most recent consequences of this changing, with the emerging of planned "ghettos" for the rich and for the poor – the first ones **04** trying to find a safer and healthy life in fake neighbourhoods (with the same consequences of the Garden Cities – the monofunctionalism and social segregation) and the others **05** resulting from wrong Social Housing Policies that created real disaster zones.

These were and still are, in a very short version, the major problems of the Portuguese urban environment in the recent years, together with a very recent fashion of the so-called " WOW FACTOR" plague.

06 *IADE Building (Totobola) in Lisbon and the "Casa da Música" in Oporto*

We should add to it, that in this country it stills a "tabu" to speak of TRADITION when related to architecture or urbanism, unless it concerns with museologic terms.

It's extremely difficult to pursuit the practice towards the ideas that C.E.U. and other organizations and professionals courageously promote for a more sustainable urban environment, without suffering exclusion and in some cases, even severe damages both in our careers and personal lives.

But with perseverance, patiently we began to be able to do something and to have some voice, and this is also a consequence of people's reaction to the unacceptable state of things.

Even the greatest "gurus" of the modernism schools (if we can call them as "schools") are now speaking of humility and taking more sustainable options for the reconstruction of the centre of cities, like the ones of Siza in Lisbon - Chiado. Things such as these were forbidden at their schools until very recently.

07 *Reconstruction of Chiado - Lisbon*
08 *Rua do Alecrim - Lisbon*

To conclude, a few examples of recent works we have made in Lisbon – one built, the other to start very soon.

09 *Janelas Verdes - Lisbon*
10 *Paço da Raínha - Lisbon*

This last one will be the 1st official rehabilitation development of the Lisbon Municipality, together with a cooperative association, where the mixed – use theories, including social mixture will be experienced and where the respect for the contextual environment – scale, materials and **TIPOLOGY** – is imposed as a pre-condition for the approval.

This consciousness of the social variety – as a pre-condition of the success of our cities – is now entering into people's mind and it's perhaps one of the most important aspects.

We remember, back to the school years, that we had colleagues from all social conditions and that was also a good aspect of our education as we learned very much respecting the differences of each others, with the urban conviviality.

That's what we need in our cities – **real conviviality in urban and in social life in the respect for the local cultural context.**

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CONCLUSIONS

Summing up, the idea of URBANITY will require in our opinion removing fully and completely those psychological ticks of interiority when acting in a given context, that is frequently expressed with those superiority attitudes that give a formal answer not in tune with the context.

In the examples that we have defined as GOOD EXAMPLES, we can appreciate and distinguish the contemporary details included in the buildings, without trampling the context, but quite the contrary enhancing it, giving it new value, and making the old fully contemporary.

Such an "inferiority complex" should be removed in our opinion

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What we want to pint out with the recourse to URBANITY is the relevance of recuperating a type of action in architecture and in the city that is natural.
A natural standing. Natural solutions, ordinary solutions
Naturalness & Ordinary as two fundamental parts of a personal and collective standing for a sustainable environment

Considering that the main factor for the preservation of a sustainable environment consists in the creation of sustainable cities, or in other words, considering that sustainability of the environment depends entirely on how sustainable cities are, these issues are of first relevance.

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