

Presentation

CITIES—the *leit motiv* for this second issue of **INTERdisciplina**—provides expressive venues for some of the problems with a major social impact in the twenty first century, such as poverty and the plundering of the environment (which entails great asymmetries in the use of natural resources and consumption of energy), that are also intertwined with other social processes that exacerbate exclusion and inequality, and from which emerge more immediate risks, such as crime and discrimination, associated with the stigmatization of the more vulnerable groups.

In this volume we present a selection of papers that show the complex character of the social processes that accompany urban development, using as our point of departure the editorial proposition of working them out on the basis of understanding the environmental issues involved, analyzing cities from the point of view of their socio-ecological links, of conceiving these settlements in bio-physical terms (in the light shed by the concept of social metabolism, for example), and of studying their expression in fractured societies, as an effect of the existing tension between the concentration of economic power and socio-economic asymmetries that become increasingly acute *vis à vis* the shortage of housing and urban services. We are able to discern the imbrication of all these processes with the demands for social justice, which could also include environmental justice. These demands, simultaneously, sorely test the formal framework of democracy in which they are expressed in most countries. The dynamics of escalating concentration of riches and resources increasingly demands the involvement of citizens to counteract progressively more authoritarian economic and political patterns.

Notwithstanding that in this issue we publish contributions primarily centered on the urban question, taken as a whole they open up a wide range of possibilities for broadening the vision of the problem and seeking a more integral understanding of the phenomenon, recognizing that it can only be grasped comprehensively with the inclusion of the rural problem—and how this interaction activates, for example, the migratory question, that further reinforces conditions of exclusion and poverty—or in terms of the dynamics of global economy—which are put into practice primarily by means of big cities—that is, considering the systemic link between social and natural processes, that are duly

emphasized by the experts in each field, and which—due to their heterogeneous nature—require interdisciplinary research.

This *dossier* enables these diverse points of view to converge on the urban issue in an effort to provide a stimulus for asking new questions capable of guiding a search for means and ways to elucidate a complex reality, and for enriching the opportunity to build integrated knowledge that should enable us—from the launching pad of citizen's participation—to improve the quality of life in these venues and reduce social inequality.

The encouragement of hybrid fields of knowledge, some of which are mentioned in this issue, and the conceptualization of the urban issue as a complex system, is fundamental for understanding and confronting it, with viable propositions, in our efforts to live in less environmentally devastating and socially just cities.