

MEDIATING HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIPS: CULTURE AND INNOVATION IN URBAN POLICIES FOR FLOURISHING OCEANS AND GLOBAL WELL-BEING



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1. INTRODUCTION

Western society has been based on the separation between nature and culture, with “natural/non-natural” concepts key for productive separations of land uses: **material extraction** (nature) *versus* **urban territories** (residential, administrative, industrial, commercial, cultural, leisure...).

Global efforts on climate change have often kept the separating paradigm between nature and culture, “natural” and “non-natural”. However,

- **We are nature** - starting by our own bodies
- **Cities are located in nature’s land**, have air and water, and **other species co-exist with us here**, daily
- Across geographies, **ecosystems inter-relate to each other**: co-structured by humans, other species and elements, such as water.

Making full use of sustainable and regenerative practices acknowledges **ecosystems interconnections** and our **interdependence** with other species: they care for us, and we must care for them.

2. CULTURE & INNOVATION AS MEDIATION

Cultural disciplines - arts, design and architecture - play a role in global emissions: 45% arise from land management, the production of buildings and overall manufacture, including food (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2019). This can change: and the ever-present, permeating qualities of culture can significantly contribute to address these issues, and to advance environmental policies from within.

Indigenous People’s knowledge inform us that climate change results from a relational fracture between humans and nature (Whyte, 2021); Celidwen and Keltner (2023) consider that kin relationality and ecological belonging are key concepts to address both within Western scientific inquiry and towards societal and planetary well-being.

To varying degrees, we have nature embedded in our culture, and this is an opportunity to work upon. Reframing the illusive boundary between nature and culture might include reconsidering **culture and innovation as mediating tools on our relationship to nature**: in a technological, material, and substantially, in an **emotional sense**.

REFERENCES

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3. BARCELONA FROM THE SEA

Coastal cities, home to a large portion of the global population, face heightened climate risks: sea-level rise and flooding, exacerbated by coastal development. Yet, these cities hold **immense potential** for **outstanding social, economic, and environmental achievements** through **cultural and innovation policies**. With a **symbolic connection to the sea**, **coastal cities** can leverage their **unique position to foster thriving relationships among citizens, species, and ecosystems**.

Barcelona has historically used urban policies to improve human health, reconnect the city with nature and transform its economic base through culture and innovation.

Examples:

- Cerdà’s urban expansion plan (1859) innovative focus on citizens’ health, with a balanced design of multi-level public green spaces with construction (“bringing the rural into the city”)
- The 1992 Olympic Games urban transformation connecting the city to the sea - further developed with the 22@ Plan, a symbolic key point in shifting the city economic base into a creative and innovative one
- More recently, the superblock programme weaved social and environmental dimensions within public spaces

Past practices are vessels, lessons to reflect upon and propel towards possibilities that **reconnect ecosystems and regenerate bonds, physically and symbolically**. Cities as Barcelona are in a privileged position to leap us into **an integrative, sustainable future**.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Culture, creativity, and innovation are crucial for social, economic and environmental change
- Nurturing the emotional connection to nature and embracing values that support a human-nature (regenerative) relationship can accelerate the flourishing of humans, other species and ecosystems
- Culture is home to the symbolism, and the relational
- Cities, and coastal cities such as Barcelona, are well-placed to foster existing cultural resources to regenerate the human-nature bond - particularly, with the sea
- This benefits all: ocean and land ecosystems, humans and more.

Future paths to explore:

- Multi-level interdisciplinary approaches with both Western science and local knowledge
- Different paradigms of complexity in understanding, decision-making and design

