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**Relation to Environment, Amplified Geography and Alternative  
Urban Planning Strategy**

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**ABSTRACT**

Recently, we always hear by urban projects in ecologically fragile territories, bearing the title "nature structures the urban", "reconnecting with the landscape", "moving out the urban planning of perimeters", "urbanism and ecological rationality", "water as Drawing »... These titles are all based on the obsession of urban planning which creates urban geographical continuity and are likely to be more 'marketing' than anything else, but implicitly or explicitly all justify a "geographical amplification" embodied in an urban project. Therefore, it seems important to explain this method of urban regeneration and development in these territories where "urban continuation" is not only a rhetorical geographical figure of a kind of "already existing" territory, but a systematic, scientific and rigorous method of knowledge of the territories supporting their project. This "geographical amplification" of fragile /peripheral territories deserves to be well elaborated especially as it questions the nature and the capacity of the environments ('les milieux' in french) to propose 'habitable' environments. The "amplified geography", is a strategy of urban planning which is considered as an instrument of construction of a habitable environment where the latent urban resource of the physical geography is transformed into project material. Starting from the notion of 'inhabited urban environments' is trying to understand how the interactions between Nature, Man and Environment occurs. Therefore, the method of amplified geography is a geographical/natural urban extension of the environment where the relation of man to nature is favored. This scientific method of urban planning (the 'amplified geography'), is a cross between the evolution of all the questions concerning the relation of man to his living environment in geography and philosophy and the theories of urban planning where physical geography is in measure.

Keywords: amplified geography, urban planning strategy, inhabited environment, human.

## Introduction

Researches on the place of geography in urban design are many and have fascinated a generation of researchers. Nevertheless, these works concern generally a "passing" (instrumental) interest of the geography without giving importance to its amplification.

Many urban projects are based on the existing of the site, on what would be its "physical geography" and claim to find the thread of the project by exploiting this kind of "geographical dimension". What we find in expressions such as "nature structures the urban", "reconnecting with the landscape", "moving out the urban planning of perimeters", "urbanism and ecological rationality", "water as Drawing »...These titles are all based on the obsession of urban planning which creates urban-geographical continuity and are likely to be more "marketing" than anything else, but implicitly or explicitly all justify a "geographical amplification" embodied into an urban project. Therefore, it seems important to highlight and explore this method of regeneration and urban development of the territory where "urban continuation" is not only a rhetorical geographical figure of a kind of "already existing" territory, but a systematic, scientific and rigorous method of knowledge of the territories supporting their project.

In this article, we will try to demonstrate that "the amplified geography", by its act of amplifying (basing/structuring the urban project on the features of the physical geography) is a very promising strategy of urban planning that is not just a form of geographical-urban extension but also a "scientific" method of construction of "habitable urban environments" (*milieux urbains habités* in French).

Urbanizing Physical geography, as we will see in this article, gives to the urban planner an objective understanding of the territory, a deep connection of man to his nature, as well as a thread for an urban project inspired from a latent urban resource (the physical geography). In this article, we will be analyzing the importance of physical geography in urban planning as well as its consideration as latent urban resource.

Today, the inhabited environments (*milieux habités* in French) are going through a deep crisis characterized by degradation and different form of imbalance seen between human and nature, as well as forms of social and cultural deconstructions. This dramatic crisis besides entering in the Anthropocene, require from us, we, architects, urban planner, geographers ... to build an alternative urban planning strategy to our fragile territories. This alternative urban planning strategy should re-activate and invent other physical, symbolic alliances between nature and culture inspired from the specific environment. This is exactly what the "amplified geography" method tends to do.

## Literature Review

According to the Oxford living dictionary<sup>1</sup>, ‘‘amplified’’ has three meanings ‘‘ Increase the volume of (sound), especially using an amplifier’’, ‘‘ Enlarge upon or add detail to (a story or statement)’’ or ‘‘ Make multiple copies of’’, it can also take the meaning of ‘‘ increasing the size or effect of something’’. Amplification means ‘‘The action of making something more marked or intense’’ or ‘‘ The action of enlarging upon or adding detail to a story or statement’’. By amplified geography, we mean a work of "urban continuation" of a physical geographical figure already existing on a territory. ‘‘Amplified geography’’ is a scientific method of urban planning that promotes man's relationship to his environment while being based on the structure of the physical geography of the territory. In this article, we will be explaining this alternative method of urban planning by tackling its various aspects.

## Methodology

In order to demonstrate that the ‘‘amplified geography’’ is a scientific method of knowledge of the territories supporting their urban project, therefore it is a scientific method of urban planning, we will refer to show/answer the relation of man to his nature expressed by many important researchers in two discipline: the geography and the philosophy, and then relate it to our method.

Asking this question (the relation of man to his nature) will attain ‘‘scientificizing’’ the method of ‘‘amplified geography’’, specially that its expression (amplified geography) carries an interdisciplinary interest as well as a double form of amplification:

The first is an amplification of the physical geographical feature (being based on the physical geography of the territory, then tracing the physical geography in a urban fabric feature). This form is always the one applied to the landscape urban projects.

The second (the one we are interested to it) is an amplification in recognizing/well knowing the fragile environment (*le milieu*), by proposing this alternative urban planning strategy which is able to construct ‘‘habitable urban environment’’ that questions the relation of man to nature, in other words that questions what does nature can propose to man, and what man could need from nature. In other word, this alternative method of urban planning carries an amplification in the way it connects/re-connects man to his environment and the way it proposes a habitable urban environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford living dictionary <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/>.

## **Importance of the Physical Geography in Urban Planning**

### *Urbanizing Physical Geography*

Recently, we always hear of ‘‘an urban physical geography’’ to meet the growing need for physical geographers insights into urban settings. As Peter Ashmore and Belinda Dodson<sup>2</sup> argue, physical geographers should embrace the opportunity to give visions into land surface characteristics and urban processes especially because we are living in the Anthropocene. As Teneley Conway said in *The Canadian Geographer*, ‘‘urban physical geography can help to build more livable cities and suburbs. [...]To advance physical geography efforts in urban areas, we can look to socio-ecological models for conceptual frameworks’’<sup>3</sup>. There is a potential for giving physical geography more importance through re-engagement in issues of urban sustainability supported by a tradition of applying research outcomes in urban planning.

Accepting a view in which social and natural processes mutually interact in space and time to produce socio-natures, rather than human decisions and actions having an impact on a separate natural environment, is part of using the physical geography in regenerating our territory. Using this existed natural resource in urban planning gives a deeper understanding of urban environments, as well as it holds some philosophical engagement in constructing/designing habitable urban environments where there is socio-natural co-production of urban landscapes.

Ashmore and Belinda expressed the importance of physical geography ‘‘by applying it to the city as setting, scale, or system’’<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, they call for ‘‘urbanizing physical geography’’.

### *Physical Geography as Latent Urban Resource*

First, the amplified geography is a scientific method/strategy of urban planning because it is considered as an instrument of construction of habitable environments where the ‘‘latent’’ urban resource of the physical geography is transformed into project material. We should not pass by before explaining what does ‘‘latent’’ means and how it is developed in the philosophical discipline specially. As a result, we will proceed to consider the physical geography as a latent resource that comes to be related not only to our urban inhabited environment but also to their urban regeneration.

Latent according to Oxford living Dictionary means an ‘‘existing but not yet developed or manifest’’, it can take also the meaning of ‘‘hidden or

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<sup>2</sup> ASHMORE, Peter, DODSON, Belinda, ‘‘Urbanizing physical geography’’ in *The Canadian Geographer* 61 (1):102-106, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> CONWAY, M. Tenley, ‘‘Conceptual pathways and institutional barriers for urban physical geography: A response to Ashmore and Dodson’’, in *The Canadian Geographer*, 61 (1): 107-111, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> ASHMORE, Peter, DODSON, Belinda, ‘‘Urbanizing physical geography’’ in *The Canadian Geographer* 61 (1):102-106, 2016.

concealed”. The word “latent” belongs to a family of terms which are arranged in pairs of notions, in which each is defined in opposition to the other: latent/manifest, virtual/actual, power/act.

Aristotle<sup>5</sup> proclaims that all substance reaches the form from which it was deprived only because it could have it, and therefore because it already had it in a certain way. So, the little one gets big because it was in power. What confers, is that only the small becomes great, and it becomes it because it was destined as its end (*telos*) or its entelechy. It will be said then that the little one was great in power and that it becomes in act when it grows and reaches its maturity. Aristotle found the process of 'Generation and corruption'. This process bears everything from power to action, in other words to his completion, from which he begins its degeneration.

Now, what’s the link between power and act from one hand, and virtual and actual from the other hand? According to the psycho-sociologist, doctor in philosophy and professor in many architecture schools in France, Chris Younes<sup>6</sup>, there is a report of continuity and identity. The notion of the actual is a repetition of the Aristotelian act. It is found in Leibniz, who has taken up several notions of Aristotle. The virtual is precisely what is in power; In other words, what is possible and can be achieved.

Coming back to the word “latent”, Chris Younes<sup>7</sup>, after analyzing these terms latent/manifest, virtual/actual, power/act, cites that what is latent is the same which can manifest itself at every moment, but also what is latent may have already been manifested. She said that before referring to Freud and citing that latent is real and in act, it is an underlying force that is continually exercised and can appear in unrecognizable or imperceptible forms before fully realizing itself.

Our main concern is this part is to explain the latency of the inhabited environments (in French *latence des milieux habités*). According to Chris Younes, the latency of the inhabited environments has different orders mainly presented as natural rhythms or individual and collective memories. These orders constitute a powerful energy, it is our duty to deceive them and to ally with them. The term “energy” comes from Greek *energia* and belongs to Aristotelian vocabulary. It binds power and action, material and form. Therefore, *energia* means “act”, “action”, activity”, “force in exercise”, and relates to form. After all, energy designs an activity which assures the passage of a dynamic tool/device from a state to another. The relation between the natural elements and the profit that human labor can draw from it, is the basis of the Cartesian project which professes a "practical philosophy" by which, “knowing the strength and actions of fire, water, air, stars, heavens, and all the other bodies that surround us”<sup>8</sup> "as we know the various trades of our

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<sup>5</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, volume 1, translated by Hugh Tredennick. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1933, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> D’ARIENZO, Roberto, LAPENNA, Annarita, ROLLOT, Mathias, YOUNES, Chris (dir.), *Ressources Urbaines Latentes*, MétisPresses, VuesDensembleEssaie, 2016, p.20.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Translated from French by Author.

craftsmen”<sup>9</sup>. We, as human, should be able to employ them in the same way "to what they agree" and thus make us "as masters and possessors of nature"<sup>10</sup> (Descartes: VI, 62). Therefore, we are in front of a big amount of "forces" and "actions" residing in these natural elements; if we know/recognize them very well, we could use them for our advantage. Every natural element has forces in it, human has to accede it and orient it / redirect it according to his need.

Thierry Paquot<sup>11</sup>, emeritus professor at the Institute of urbanism of Paris, has noted the frequency of the word "energy" with the side of "force", "power", "vibration", "tension", "vitality", "rhythm", and being always associated with the Big City and also with the machine and the technique. Henri Chombart de Lauwe, the urban sociologist, declares the representations of energy in nature as "space of ideas" (espace des idées). This space of ideas, made up of imaginary and symbolic data, realizes the natural-cultural relationships that man maintains with his living environment and, more generally, realizes his mental universe. These imaginary and symbolic data (the representative structures), which express the idea of the world, determine the image that the subjects have of the world while also conditioning their relations with the physical and social environment. Finally, we can say, and as Chris Younes concludes in *Ressources Urbaines Latentes*<sup>12</sup> that the physical, spiritual and poetic concept of energy is a latent power which animates our inhabited environment. Therefore, the physical geography carries this **energy**, so it is considered as a form of **latent power** which animates our inhabited environment (*nos milieux habités*).

For now, regenerating a fragile territory by using its existed physical geography with what it holds of latent powerful resource is, in fact, building an alternative scenario of coexistence that faces the dramatic effects of the deterritorialized methods of constructing the contemporary urban space.

### **The Relation of Man to Nature**

To 'live' in a specific environment (milieu) is the result of the intersection of different layers that are social, physical, symbolic and existential. These intersections expose the knowledge about the specific modes of human living. Working on interlinking these layers and assuring alliances between man/societies and the natural background that include them is what the method of "the amplified geography" tends to do. Seeking this object of interlinking made of it a "scientific/rigorous" method of urban planning specially that it answers the different formulas of the relation of man to his nature theorized in the geography and the philosophy.

In order to clarify our point of view, we will explain how does the relation of man to his living environment is expressed the two disciplines (geography

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<sup>9</sup> Translated from French by Author.

<sup>10</sup> DESCARTES, René, *Discours de la méthode*, Paris, Vrin, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> PAQUOT, Thierry, *Un philosophe en ville*, Gollion, Infolio, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> D'ARIENZO, Roberto, LAPENNA, Annarita, ROLLOT, Mathias, YOUNES, Chris (dir.), *Ressources Urbaines Latentes*, MétisPresses, VuesDensembleEssaie, 2016, p.28.

and philosophy), and how at the end the different formulas meet our scientific method of urban planning, the ‘‘amplified geography’’.

The geographical discipline has treated largely our question. Since in the early nineteenth century, many thinkers have been interested in the relationship of man to his environment, beginning with Carl Ritter and Humboldt who have largely spoken of Kosmos, then to Ratzel and his anthropogeography, before reaching the geopolitics with Michelet.

We could not pass by before citing Elisée Reclus in *The evolution of cities* (1895) and his opinion in this concern. For him, the relation of primitive and civilized man to his nature was very important because it was the rational reason of founding/planning a city. As for example, ‘‘At the earliest beginnings of written history, among the Chaldeans and the Egyptians, on the borders of the Euphrates and the Nile, the city had long existed, and it appears by that time to have numbered its habitants by tens and hundreds of thousands.’’<sup>13</sup> Also he cited ‘‘ when Athens, Megara, Sicyon sprang up at the foot of their hills like flowers in the shade of the olive tree. [...] The whole country, the fatherland of the citizen, was contained within a narrow space. From the heights, its acropolis he could follow with his eye the limits of the collective domain [...]. The peasants, on their part, regarded the city as peculiarly their own. They knew the beaten paths that had grown to be its streets, the broad roads and squares that still bore the names of the trees that used to grow there [...]. High on the summit of the protecting hill rose the temple of the sculptured deity whom they invoked in hours of public danger, and behind its ramparts they all took refuge when the enemy was in possession of the open country.’’<sup>14</sup>. For him, the sites of all past inhabited towns are indicated by one condition that meets two important features, one is related to nature, the other is related to man: the site of the future town should be a natural meeting-place common to various centers of productions and human interests. As for Paul Vidal de La Blache, he related natural and human factors. Under the implicit cover of the couple site / situation, urban configurations are elaborated in the combined play of topography and circulation. Vidal discovered that the rooting of human societies is natural and this led him to interpret what makes sense in the foundation of cities.

Proceed answering our question in some of the contemporary geographical authors examples, Nicole Mathieu, emeritus research director in CNRS, responds to our question by combining the relation of man to the ‘‘materiality’’ of his environment that she called ‘‘mode of habitation’’ (*mode d’habitation*)<sup>15</sup>. She affirmed that the geographical approach leads to represent the city as a set of environments (*milieux*), emphasizing on all what makes the materiality of the places (pollution, materials and forms of the building, etc.). Also, it represents the relation of each individual to the materiality of the environments, which we call ‘‘mode of habitation’’. She added that the re-articulation between physical

<sup>13</sup> RECLUS, Elisée, *The evolution of cities*, 1895, p. 248.

<sup>14</sup> RECLUS, Elisée, *The evolution of cities*, 1895, p. 249.

<sup>15</sup> MATHIEU, Nicole, *Repenser la nature dans la ville: un enjeu pour la géographie*, in *Nature Sciences Sociétés*, Juillet 2000, pp. 457, 459.

geography and human geography and the return of the living individual in the geographical analysis, are therefore today the major issues of the "geographical turn. Nicole Mathieu, by explaining to us how to analyze objectively the urban naturalness, explains to us that there is something called "produced nature" which is resulted from the process of the relationship between natural and artificial facts, which its dominant characteristic is either the natural side (snowfall and bottling, severe thunderstorms or storms, etc.) or the technical side (air pollution, waste and quality of water, polluted soils, light pollution, etc.). What also interest us in her work is that she explained, in one way or another, in a theoretical approach, how does the amplified geography works by saying " [...] *l'acte d'habiter rencontre un support qui, matériellement, le conditionne et réciproquement transforme la matérialité. Il ne s'agit donc pas de concilier deux dimensions hétérogènes -le naturel et le social, le lieu et l'habitant- ni de les 'intégrer', mais bien de maintenir la tension qui les réunit sans préjuger de la relation potentiellement évolutive qui en résultera.*"<sup>16</sup>

Also, the French geographer Nathalie Blanc<sup>17</sup> responds to our question (relation of man to nature) by claiming that there are relations of dependence between the different elements of the environment and the human beings who inhabit it, in other words, it is the inseparable relation between the urban environment and the urban **aesthetics** which is at the heart of the reflection. She declares "that the city-dweller in his relationship to the environment, builds and exposes "an ordinary creativity". Thus, an aesthetic peculiar to everyday life emerges from the simple fact of inhabiting and the sensitivity of individuals with regard to plants and animals"<sup>18</sup>. By referring to John Dewey<sup>19</sup>, Nathalie Blanc said that the aesthetic staging of nature should not be seen as a fixed decoration in time and space but as fluctuating systems of interaction capable of overturning the representation of the world. It is in a constant process of transformation and reciprocal adaptations that man interacts with nature by giving it meaning. Therefore, we have what we call the "environmental aesthetics" which shows, at the same time, the permanence of the idea of an "inhabited" world anchored in space and in time, and the contingency as essential data to understand the dynamical relationship to nature.

Many other authors state that the environment plays a fundamental role in the recognition of oneself and of one's community through " forms of life " or ways of living, as Patricia Paperman and Sandra Laugier in *Le souci des autres. Éthique et politique du care* (2005) and Honneth Axel in *La réification. Petit traité de Théorie critique* (2007).

Philosophy has also largely discussed the relation of man to his environment (milieu) by many researchers such as Edgar Morin, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari,

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<sup>16</sup> MATHIEU, Nicole, "Modes d'habiter", "cultures de la nature" : des concepts indissociables, in CHONÉ, Aurélie, HAJEK, Isabelle, HAMMAN, Philippe (dir.), *Guide des humanités environnementales*, Septentrion, 2016, pp. 567, 581.

<sup>17</sup> BLANC, Nathalie, *Les nouvelles esthétiques urbaines*, Paris, Armand, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Translated from French by Author.

<sup>19</sup> DEWEY, John, *Expérience et nature*, Gallimard, 2012.

Chris Younes, Thierry Paquot, Augustin Berque, Benoit Goetz, Philippe Descola, Jean-Marc Ghitti, Henri Maldiney, Michel Mangematin, Fudo Watsuji ...

In this paragraph, we will show you that also philosophy theorizes and makes more solid the method of “amplified geography” that corresponds to all what have been discussed on the relation of man to his environment (*milieu*).

Starting by Chris Younes, the one who studied deeply “*les milieux habités*”, (we would like in this paragraph to keep it written in French to not lose any of its meaning specially that “*les milieux habités*” is a dear expression to Chris Younes’s heart). Chris Younes’<sup>20</sup> meaning of the word “milieu” is the result of a long series of paradigmatic transformations as how are binded the exterior and the interior, the part and the whole, as well as the elements between them, between order and chaos. In ancient Greek, as Agamben<sup>21</sup> recalled, the living refers to two calls: that of *zoe*, the fact of living, whether to being animals or men, and that of *bios*, form or way of living of an individual. In the beginning of the 20th century, the naturalist and biologist Uexkull<sup>22</sup> proved to be very significant. He was an outstanding figure in ethics and analyzed how the living animal or human constructs its territory and how it (the living animal or human) involves perception and behavior to establish a spatiotemporal world linking external and internal. Two interrelated concepts are essential to his work: the *Umwelt*<sup>23</sup> as an “outside world” and the *Innenwelt* or “inner world”, which highlight how each living person associates them. Von Uexkull calls for the relation of the *Umwelt* (*milieu*’s behavior (*milieu de comportement*) to the *Umgebung* (geographical environment). Canguilhem<sup>24</sup>, who explains that there is no “the” *milieu*, but the *milieu* “of” summarizes by saying: The *Umwelt* is an elective levy in the *Umgebung*, in the geographical environment. But the environment is precisely nothing other than the *Umwelt* of man, which is, the usual world of his perspective and pragmatic experience. *Umgebung*, this geographical environment (external to the animal) is, in a sense, centered, ordered, oriented by a human subject, therefore, it is a creator of techniques, creator of values.

## Conclusions

After exposing this genealogy of the relation of man to nature as well as to his environment in Geography and Philosophy, and the importance of the physical geography in urban planning, we can say that the assumed proposition of the capability of the “amplified geography” to construct “habitable urban

<sup>20</sup> YOUNÈS, Chris, “Des milieux qui font monde”, in PAQUOT, Thierry, (DIR), *Repenser l’urbanisme*, Infolio éditions, 2013, p. 125.

<sup>21</sup> AGAMBEN, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer, Le pouvoir souverain et la vie nue*, Paris, Seuil, 1997, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> UEXKÜLL, Jakob von, *Mondes animaux, monde humain, [Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere, Berlin, Springer, 1909]*, trad. Ph. Muller, Paris, Pocket, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> German language.

<sup>24</sup> CANGUILHEM Georges, chap. “Le vivant et son milieu” in *Connaissance de la vie*, Paris, Vrin, 1992, 185-186.

environments” is true. It is so, because it meets what has been theorized in Geography and Philosophy in this subject, and is being reinforced by all what have been said on the importance of urbanizing physical geography. Therefore, we can largely consider that the “amplified geography” is a scientific method of urban planning.

Accepting a view in which social and natural processes mutually interact in space and time to produce socio-natures, rather than human decisions and actions having an impact on a separate natural environment, is part of the method of the “amplified geography”. We consider this method an alternative urban planning strategy for fragile territories. It is a scientific method that has the potential for a deeper understanding of urban environments, as well as it holds some philosophical shifts in the norms and practices of the physical geography in nature. This method is a direction towards understanding the socio-natural co-production of urban landscapes. Thinking through the socio-natural co-production of habitable urban environments offers an essential vision and important engagement of physical geography with human systems. It is a scientific method of urban planning that imagines urban scenarios while considering the territory resistance as well as its proper resources. Therefore, we are in front of an ethic-environmental attitude that redefines the challenges of the natural and cultural heritage.

Approaching the method of “Amplified geography” in regenerating our fragile territories open up a new field of studies, especially for architecture researchers as for How does the “amplified geography” relate to the soil and to architecture? In other word, what could be the “amplified architecture” interventions on the small scale?

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