

Future urban communities include agriculture

As the world's population increases, people are living in ever more sprawling cities.

In 2018, Shanghai, China, had the most residents of any city, approximately 24.1 million, according to www.worldatlas.com. New York City had the largest population of any U.S. metropolis, with approximately 8.4 million residents.

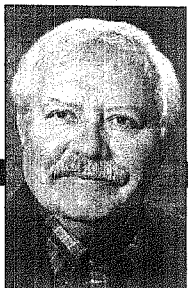
Urban communities everywhere are grappling with much more than housing and transportation as they seek to accommodate burgeoning numbers of residents. Major challenges for urban planners include, but are not limited to, supplying food, energy and fundamental services such as education, medical care, recreation and sociocultural interactions for masses of biologically and politically diverse people.

Recognizing that urban centers are searching for ideas to guide planning, the International Society of Biourbanism (ISB) drafted guidelines for urban communities to consider in the future during a week-long "think tank" this past July. The ISB brought together about a dozen experts from around the world with varying perspectives.

They traveled to old Ardena, Italy, a mountain-side town outside of Rome that was largely destroyed five times but has always learned from reconstituting

Farm and Ranch Life

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ing during its eight centuries of existence.

Their aim was to come up with principles that urban communities — ranging from small towns like old Ardena with its 1,000 residents to large cities with many millions of residents — can apply as they face seemingly overwhelming challenges to their infrastructure, design and their desired outcomes when planning their futures. The think tank participants called all the variably sized communities "biourban systems".

The challenges that biourban system designers often face include industrialization which favors those with technological knowledge and financial power, in a world that is increasingly connected globally and dominated by the powerful while nearly all the residents want morally fair opportunities and equal access to the community's assets. The residents of the biourban complexes are increasingly diverse culturally, po-

litically and physically.

The recommended guiding principles of the ISB think tank for healthy biourban systems apply to rural as well as urban areas. Here are the key guidelines devised by the ISB workshop participants:

- Biourban systems should be as self-sufficient as possible.

- Culture should necessarily supersede economics as a guiding force in the design and long-term survival of communities and in the development of new living institutions.

- The behavior of the communities that flourish will embrace aid to everyone and cooperation by everyone within the community environment rather than competition and dominance among its residents and institutions.

- Responsibility for the total community is shared among its dwellers.

- The overall aim of the total community is peaceful coexistence rather than conflict.

- Biourban systems must recognize and give voice to the arts as well as the sciences, technology and financial principles.

- Biourban systems should seek to connect people to place, landscape and climate.

- Healthy biourban systems are multifunctional and autonomous in supplying energy, food and fundamental services.

- Agriculture will be undertaken in urban environments to supply most food, fibers and energy.

- They enhance environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability and strengthen diversity.

- Healthy biourban systems work with existing biology rather than depend on technology to solve problems.

- They keep their methods as simple and compact as possible for the well-being of everyone and to encourage social interaction and communication.

The guiding principles the ISB recommended are not the only approach to designing urban environments; urban planners throughout the world are looking at many ways to enable an increasing population with ever more complexities to survive and thrive in the future.

The ISB recommendations are unique in that they emphasize perspectives from architects, philosophers, artists, linguists, psychologists and such "soft sciences" as history and sociology, rather than perspectives mostly from experts in technology, politics, economics and construction.

Humans will have to live together peaceably and within the constraints of existing resources if humans are to remain alive in large masses in the future. While

conflict and war seem more likely in a world with evermore people who must share resources, formulas are needed that promote healthy behaviors and healthy living methods.

Dr. Stefano Serafini, the think tank organizer, noted, "When cities were first founded centuries ago, there was no divide between the rural and urban." Urban planners nowadays focus on megalopolises and technology, but better approaches may be observed in towns and cities that have survived for multiple centuries.

Serafini added, "Cities blossomed from their own agricultural countryside and were nothing but a form of farming. Not by chance, these cities were built without technical mediation by their own dwellers, mostly farmers."

All people can learn from towns and cities that have survived long-term, which is why the ISB guidelines are useful. I thank Sara Bissen, a native Iowan, and her husband, Stefano Serafini, who are residents of Ardena, for their leadership in such a daunting undertaking as managing a "think tank" about future living in a crowded world.

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