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ARCHETYPES AND UNCERTAINTIES

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20TH CENTURY NEW TOWNS
Archetypes and Uncertainties

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Uncertainty is a keyword of the 20th century urban history. Wars, depressions, crisis and social and technological advancements have showed us how deep the changes in economic, political and social systems were responsible for the emergence of urban planning and management practices and how their uncertainties became deeply embedded within them.

Uncertainty grew with the increased tendency for fragmented systems—of spaces, society and information—which compose our contemporary “third cities” (Borja 2003)—and with the increased mobility of goods, information and people (Ascher 2010) as conflicts and incompatibilities arose. Several authors created new names for these relational systems in an effort to think beyond the canonical city—Gottmann's Megalopolis, Hall's Disappearing City, Garreau's Edge City, Corboz's Ippercità, Koolhaas' Generic City, Ascher's Metapolis, Sieverts' Zwischenstadt and Indovina's Diffuse City, among others. Concepts and methods are thus being questioned as they do not efficiently respond to these territories' needs: the notion of limits (morphological, administrative, symbolic, disciplinary), the efficacy of formal planning, the hierarchical and linear planning systems, to name a few.

Yet, these concepts still inform planning and urban management practices, making them unresponsive to the uncertainties and opportunities of our contemporary territories. As a response, other concepts are emerging—informality, flexibility, networking, hybrid and intermediary systems—as a better basis for a strategic, incremental and heuristic “new urbanism” (Ascher 1991).

This paper is part of a preliminary PhD research on the flexibility of the instruments of territorial management and their efficacy on regulating the contemporary urban space, and will focus on the uncertainties present on the post-war New Towns experiences and on the influential Garden City movement, and on what contemporary urban planning—as a process still incomplete and open to different interpretations and appropriation processes—can learn from them.