

# Fourth Nature: Regenerating Cosmicity

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## 1 ABSTRACT

What characterizes the New Era? The New Era signifies a shift towards a heightened consciousness of interconnectedness and responsibilities, both within ourselves and with the external world. Our homes and cities are built in a way that discourages meaningful connections and lacks a sense of cosmic integration - they exist in isolation from the natural order. As humans, endowed with unique capabilities, we play a role in co-creating our reality. This underscores the importance of urban regeneration, which must occur in tandem with human evolution. Nature is ready to initiate the necessary regeneration urgently required. "Because we, as proud children of science and reason, have made ourselves orphans of ancestral knowledge and Nature wisdom" - as says Chopra. This is where the Fourth Nature concept emerges, offering a path forward: it ignites a new consciousness within us and becomes manifest in our living spaces. The failures observed in current models stem from our failure to acknowledge ourselves and our creations as integral parts of Nature. While this separation may exist primarily in our minds, its effects are profound. To harness the full potential of our technological advancements, we must cultivate greater sensitivity, for the betterment of our own well-being and that of all humanity. It signifies a new paradigm. Our evolutionary journey depends on a significant leap in consciousness - embracing cosmicity, the state of being cosmic, integrated, and interconnected. The absence of Nature in our cities and lives is no longer tenable. The repercussions of this disconnect are palpable: natural calamities, widespread hunger, and pervasive poverty, despite the Earth's inherent abundance. Regeneration extends beyond brownfields; it is imperative across all urbanized areas where Nature has been neglected, disregarded, or excluded. The city of Porto Alegre, for example, has a former industrial area called Fourth District - a zone where Nature shows its power and presence amidst neglect. Towering trees calmly observe humanity's struggles under its shadow. Wild fruits and flowers thrive along walkways, while old buildings offer shelter to residents on cozy balconies and benches, in an interesting scale. Revitalizing this area may not be as daunting as it might seem. It involves more than mere preservation or devastation; it entails understanding the quality of the pre-existence as well as restoring the connection to local food production, implementing sustainable waste and rainwater management strategies, and employing intelligent, cost-effective building practices. This paper explores the idea that the success of the New Era hinges on such actions - where healthy living is not merely an option but the most accessible choice for all.

Based on Nature and enhanced by our true consciousness.

Keywords: cosmicity, new era, fourth nature, human evolution, urban regeneration

## 2 A NEW ERA OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In this article, attending the REAL CORP 2024 call for papers, some recent insights are brought under the topic: "Urban Regeneration and Revitalisation: Making Older Urban Quarters Fit for the Future" examining the prevailing trends and offering a new perspective into navigating the challenges, particularly in the brownfield area known as the Fourth District in Porto Alegre, South Brazil. A good starting point would be to acknowledge humanity's capacity to make decisions based on our experiences and thoughts, recognizing their mutual influence. Once we have the chance to experience good opportunities and situations, we might certainly opt for more situations that lead us to better experiences. Because we are conscious we can choose to be happy (CSIKSZENT, 1990). However, our daily lives often fail to provide optimal conditions, leading to unfavorable choices. The advent of the New Era hinges upon our collective and conscious pursuit of creating positive experiences available to everyone.

The Fourth Nature concept supports this objective by acknowledging that enhancing our relationship with Nature can improve our quality of life. It underscores the importance of integrating this relationship into our daily routines to promote positive transformations (PROCHNOW, 2020). Nature has the ability to bridge the contemporary divides that complicate the realm of life in our cities, demonstrating that this complexity is neither inherent nor ideal. The joy of strolling beneath a canopy of trees on a sunny day can profoundly alter our perception of a neighborhood or street, as well as change the way we mentally start our day. This

exemplifies how the Fourth Nature concept elevates the relationship between humans and Nature. It prompts us to recognize ourselves as part of Nature and to acknowledge our role in transforming it into our culture, into our cities.

Cicero, writing before Christ, brought up a concept known as Second Nature, wherein humans modified the natural environment to fulfill essential needs such as food and transportation. Later, during the Italian Renaissance, scholars like Jacopo Bonfadio explored the idea of a Third Nature - "una terza natura" - where humanity altered Nature for aesthetic pleasure. This involved the creation of elaborate gardens where technology and art converged to enhance enjoyment and appreciation of the natural world (HUNT, 1992). Therefore, the Fourth Nature concept, as developed in my thesis and research, presents the potential for a new level of interaction. It underscores the realization that, despite numerous catastrophes and calamities, we cannot afford to disregard Nature's power. It emphasizes that aligning ourselves with Nature's cycles and rhythms will lead to greater happiness and well-being, precisely because we are inherently connected to them.

We can understand that living in alignment with Nature means designing and planning our lives to coexist harmoniously with the natural world, learning to observe its characteristics and evolving alongside it. The consistent presence of Nature in our lives possesses the transformative power to awaken us from the sense of disconnection and hypnosis that pervades modern existence. When we reconnect with our surroundings and recognize our ability to shape our environment, we begin to realign with our true path. This mutual influence between humanity and Nature has the potential to revolutionize our approach to planning and ultimately reshape our reality.

Central to this shift in consciousness is the recognition that we are the builders of our own world, shaping it through our choices and actions. By tapping into Nature's wisdom and drawing upon ancestral knowledge, often rooted in natural principles, we can find solutions to the challenges we face. Urban regeneration belongs to the advent of the New Era, which hinges on our ability to reclaim these capacities, becoming conscious human beings once again. This explains why regeneration will only happen in a positive way when together with human evolution - my research scope of attention at this moment.

### 3 COSMICITY

Cosmicity represents a state of being interconnected with the cosmos, integrated and intertwined with the universe. This state is inherent to our existence, yet we find ourselves in a paradoxical reality where the natural flow of life is disrupted and the outcomes we experience fall short of satisfaction, highlighting these ruptures in our connection. The absence of a holistic understanding exacerbates this disconnection, hindering the natural flow of existence. Given that architecture and urbanism serve as the intermediary layer between us and the natural world, they wield the ability to either strengthen or weaken the crucial connection that eludes us. Our cities, constructed without due regard for Nature, overlook our inherent dependency on it, thereby contributing to the illness afflicting both us and the urban landscape itself.

Amerindian communities do not have a distinct term in their language to encapsulate the concept of Nature. Instead, they perceive reality as a seamless continuum, wherein humanity, animals, plants, and celestial bodies are intricately interconnected and share responsibilities in the continual creation and recreation of life (KRENAK, 2020). The notion of cosmicity explored in my research closely aligns with this perspective, emphasizing principles of unity, respect, and reverence for all forms of life. Without this vital connection to life's sources, our evolutionary trajectory may culminate in our own demise, as some scholars suggest has already occurred on our planet (TOMAS, 1972). I share a positive view, in which we are able to perceive the turning point that is getting clear in front of us.

The idea of cosmicity encompasses the idea of interconnectedness across various scales, in a fractal pattern. Positive outcomes achieved on a small scale have the potential to reverberate and manifest on larger scales. For instance, managing household waste responsibly, mirroring nature's efficient transformation processes where nothing is wasted or lacking. Reevaluating consumer habits, such as repurposing used items or supporting local producers by purchasing fresh produce from nearby markets, thus reducing the need for packaging and transportation. Adopting a fresh plant-based diet. All these actions hold transformative potential, not just on an individual level but on a global scale. However, to actualize these changes, it's essential to reside in environments that foster and support such sustainable actions.

We can think of cities worldwide as intricate cellular structures composed of smaller units such as houses and buildings. These smaller units, in turn, consist of materials used in construction, analogous to the components of our bodies. The activities within our homes and cities, including the consumption and disposal of resources, collectively impact the planet. Similar to how our bodies require sunlight and clean air to thrive, healthy homes need access to natural elements. Just as our bodies derive energy from natural sources, the vitality of our homes depends on harnessing and processing energy from renewable sources.

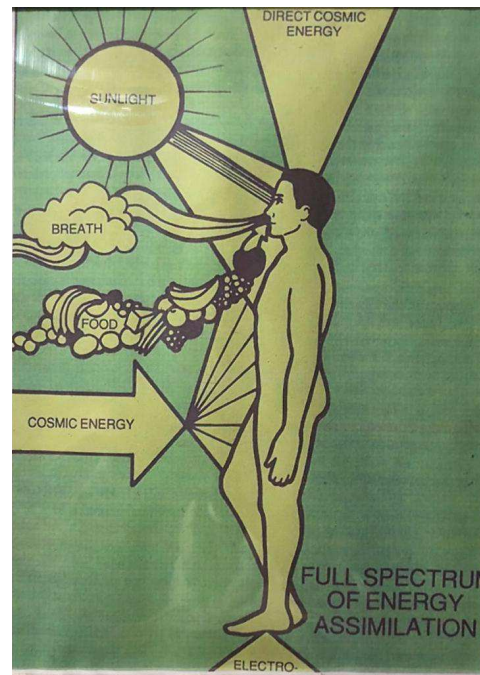


Fig. 1: Energy assimilation by the human body (public domain).

Indeed, it's truly remarkable to acknowledge the depth of our interconnectedness with the world around us and our reliance on it for our overall well-being (see Figure 1). The full spectrum of our bodies' energy assimilation derives energy from a diverse range of sources, encompassing not only food but also sunlight, cosmic energy, air, and electromagnetic energy from the ground. However, for those of us residing in urban environments, the opportunity to experience direct contact with the ground, even for a brief period each day, is often limited.

This raises a pivotal question and reflection, which lies at the heart of this paper: regeneration must take these fundamental basic well being issues into consideration. At the heart of the matter lies the need to design and redesign our cities with a clear understanding of what constitutes a healthy life. Recognizing our inherent connection to Nature shouldn't be complicated or intimidating - it should be evident. Integrating green spaces into buildings, ensuring ample access to sunlight, establishing communal composting areas and vegetable gardens - these are all embodiments of the Fourth Nature concept. It's widely recognized that Nature provides solutions to a diverse range of challenges, encompassing both physical and mental well-being, as well as addressing social needs.

As urban planners, we frequently discuss the concept of multipurpose urban spaces. However, there is often insufficient dialogue about Nature-based solutions and environments. Reintroducing Nature into our cities across all scales represents the turning point for successful regeneration efforts. Fourth Nature suggests that by revitalizing our cities, we can also revitalize humanity, and vice versa. Embracing a holistic approach to this process unveils the untapped potential for profound transformation. Significant changes can unfold within a relatively short time frame, guiding us back to our rightful place within the natural order. We are the fruit of an ancestral lineage deeply rooted in Nature. This ancestry, this biophilic being is with and within us, accompanying us wherever we are, whether in the forests or in the big city (GIMOVSKI, 2023). Cosmicity, much like Fourth Nature, resides within us - it simply awaits our acknowledgment to manifest externally.

“Study Nature, love nature, stay close to Nature, it will never fail you”. Frank Lloyd Wright

Numerous studies and authors have explored the topic of longevity, yet the essence lies in healthy longevity. Undoubtedly, the world has undergone significant changes over the years, decades, and centuries—we're in a

constant state of flux. However, it's crucial that we glean insights from these transformations and integrate them into our lives. True regeneration entails not just a focus on quantity but a commitment to quality. While the demands of a global population exceeding eight billion are undeniably significant, we possess the resources to navigate these challenges. What escapes us is consciousness over the utilization of renewable resources, which are vital elements we are not fully caring about.

Technology offers avenues to address and enhance our urban landscapes. However, Fourth Nature advocates for more than just technological solutions; it emphasizes the importance of reclaiming ancient knowledge and tapping into Nature's inherent wisdom. By reestablishing our connection with the natural world, we can restore a sense of quality to our lives in a much easier way.

So, what are the essential ingredients to live well?

Security and freedom are foundational human needs. Security encompasses the sense of safety within our homes, communities, workplaces, and urban landscapes. Likewise, freedom flourishes when individuals are empowered to make choices and have the necessary conditions to access a realm of possibilities. However, many of today's cities fall short in providing environments conducive to fulfilling these needs.

#### **4 THE DESIRED FUTURE MAY HAVE ALREADY EXISTED**

Cities everywhere around the world are undergoing transformations fueled by evolving human needs and perspectives. However, true change will only materialize when we collectively realize our interconnectedness with Nature. The aftermath of the pandemic has released a wave of pent-up desires and vocations. We all noticed how unhappy we were when we were forced to be locked in, disconnected from our passions and loved ones. Our existence does not flourish when we have no time to contemplate being here and now. We get sick when we feel disconnected.

Porto Alegre, located in southern Brazil, has long fascinated me for several reasons. Firstly, its reputation as a relatively green city stands out, with over a million trees cohabiting alongside a population of one million and three hundred thousand residents, almost equating to one tree per person. Additionally, my interest in architectural heritage is piqued by Porto Alegre's potential to blend old and new, revitalizing historic buildings to play an active role in contemporary urban life. This fusion of different eras within the same space forms the basis of my dissertation, titled *Heterochrony in Architecture - The Project as Heritage Enabler* (PROCHNOW, 2016), which explores the dynamic outcomes of such juxtapositions in urban environments. Porto Alegre is home to a former industrial area known as The Fourth District, which has a lot of character and historic significance. Despite its interesting characteristics, this area has remained largely dormant for decades. However, in recent times, it has garnered renewed interest and popularity. The image of the spatial environment, the mental representation of the character and structure of the geographic world – according to Kevin Lynch in his book *What Time is this Place?* - is like a support to which we attribute many meanings and a guide by which we can order our movements. This image has an immediate practical function in our lives, and an even deeper psychological function. Many parallel statements can be made about the environmental picture of time in our collective memory as well as in each one of us. Both have intimate connections to landscape aesthetics and more general implications for social structure and social change.” It is clear that we must think about an environmental image that is both spatial and temporal, just as we must design environments in which the distribution of qualities are considered in both time and space” (LYNCH, 1972). We could say the Fourth District has the biggest luxury of our time: space. Free space in an already urbanized area. Coupled with space, it has diverse architecture and a vibrant community. These important features present what is considered to be an ideal canvas for future cityscapes. What was clearly identified in the research as points that deserve attention, in the Fourth District as well as in many other areas of different cities, are Nature and infrastructure - exactly two ingredients that together are catalysts in the processes of urban regeneration. By embracing nature-based solutions and implementing blue-green infrastructure, we can unlock the district's full potential as a hub of creativity and sustainability. This intentional approach to design has the power to transform the Fourth District into a model for innovative and environmentally enriching urban spaces.

The Fourth District is positioned along the shores of Lake Guaíba but tragically severed from its natural connection. Over time, the area underwent significant waterproofing, leading to the loss of its wetlands.



Moreover, the infrastructure has remained outdated, and vegetation has proliferated unchecked in certain areas. These conditions present a formidable challenge for the district's successful regeneration efforts.

Amidst these challenges, the Fourth District boasts intriguing examples of architectural remnants dating back to the early twentieth century and subsequent decades. These include industrial structures, workers' patio-houses, and smaller buildings, each representing different scales of urban living. However, I wish to emphasize the significance of residential buildings in this paper. They serve as a testament to a bygone era when daily life epitomized community, connectivity, and harmony with nature. Residents lived within walking distance of their workplaces, fostering strong connections with their surroundings and promoting social interaction and a sense of community. These residential buildings in the Fourth District gather some of these qualities, in different combinations. This is what we are looking for, today.

Some of these buildings still stand resilient (see fig. 2), as a piece of resistance, despite facing challenges from social, economic, and environmental pressures, as well as the influence of the starting real estate production. When prompted to "keep planning for the real world," especially in revitalizing old areas to meet contemporary needs, it seems prudent to carefully consider what these needs entail. It's possible that the solution for them has already existed, and we merely need to adapt them to our current circumstances. In truth, genuine progress reminds us that our fundamental human needs remain relatively unchanged over time. However, we often overlook them, distracted by the multitude of tasks and information that bombard us daily.



Fig. 2: Example of a street atmosphere in the Fourth District today - the desired future may have already existed. By the author.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The concept of evolution proposes that new forms arise from those already present in the world.

It's fascinating to observe that elements reliant on Nature are undergoing self-regeneration in the Fourth District, even after years of stagnation. Features influenced by Nature's rhythms and cycles have adapted on their own, without human intervention. Now, the priority should be to facilitate and support this process towards desired outcomes: nature-based solutions for revitalizing urban life.

The pressing need for housing can start by the regeneration of the existing constructions - renewing the ones that are still there, updating its liveable conditions, but most of all, understanding and valuing its qualities and using them as inspiration for building new ones, that mirror their standards. They seem to show more clearly what should define a project, made at a time when the financial result was not exclusively what determined the rules.

Towards which objective are we going to regenerate the city? In this context, Fourth Nature endeavors to forge a new paradigm that blends past achievements with the evolving concept of interconnectedness and harmony. It is entirely plausible to develop our cities and rejuvenate established communities guided by

these principles. The initial step entails recognizing the merits of the past: discerning successful strategies, understanding their functionality, and extracting valuable insights from seemingly static scenarios for our imminent future (see fig. 3, 4, 5 and 6). After all, the extreme speed in which things change does not seem to be a good leitmotif.

To return to the right path we first must reassess our values and aspirations, and cultivate a deeper understanding of our objectives. What fundamental experiences truly define our humanity, and how can our urban environments facilitate them? It begins for example with integrating nature into our surroundings - balconies adorned with greenery, providing a tangible connection to the changing seasons. Neighborhoods where local markets bring fresh produce from farm to table. Active ground floors where artisans and small entrepreneurs can showcase their handcrafted goods and services, fostering community engagement, face-to-face interaction and above all, self realization. Living close to public green places that provide tranquility for casual gatherings and local cultural events.

Ultimately, by designing a world that prioritizes human experience in a harmonious relationship with Nature and consequently with the whole cosmos, we can pave the way towards the possibility of having a new story to tell (GLEISER, 2023). The higher a civilization ascends, it is paramount to firstly seek internal realization in order to stabilize society and then subserve the solution of its material problems.

Coexisting in harmony with Nature is key.



Fig. 3,4 and 5: Some dynamics existing in the Fourth District nowadays – this is REAL. By the author.

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