





**JOSEPH DI PASQUALE**

# **URBAN BEINGS**

**The relational city and new paradigms of living**

with written contributions by  
Ilde Kantzas, Federica Colzani, Elena Coda

preface by Carlo Masseroli



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Martyn Anderson

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Il Poligrafo casa editrice  
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via Cassan, 34 (piazza Eremitani)  
tel. 049 8360887 | fax 049 8360864  
e-mail [casaeditrice@poligrafo.it](mailto:casaeditrice@poligrafo.it)  
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## Preface

Carlo Masseroli

CEO of Nhood

I have known Joseph di Pasquale for about 15 years. We do not see each other very often but I can assure you that, ever since we first met, he has never stopped thinking about the form of cities and their component parts to ensure they are ideally geared to the needs of ‘urban beings’ and, consequently, about how architects can boost people’s quality of life.

A little less than 10 years ago, we decided to carry out an experiment working with a friend we have in common, Matteo Citterio: a new form of temporary hospitality; low-cost designer hotel rooms constructed by converting and fitting out containers. The project was called “Hotel Pop Up”, but it got bogged down in the bureaucracy of administration procedures.

A pilot project of this experiment is now underway that epitomises a new paradigm of housing, as described in this book. So-called “adaptive domestic perimeter” homes, whose layout varies in relation to the age of the people living in them.

*Urban Beings* should not be seen as ‘just’ a heartfelt theoretical study triggered off by sudden changes in the age in which we live, but also, and primarily, as an intellectual framework that new ideas for tackling these issues can refer to.

The book is based on a bold claim on the author’s part: cities are the key to all the major changes that have taken place this century. It is a claim I concur with.

All those people who thought the pandemic would weaken cities have also been proven wrong. The need for relations between people, which underpins the very life of cities, has triumphed again.

Cities give us what we are looking for: physical and economic security; services; all kinds of relationships; entertainment; art and culture; and even opportunities to display our skills, showcase our creativity and make use of our talents.

In his book entitled *Triumph of the City*, Edward Glaeser claims that cities enable the transition from poverty to prosperity; Saskia Sassen, a sociologist at the University of Chicago and inventor of the concept of the Global City, draws attention to the fact that technology allows the headquarters of large corporations to be located outside cities: so why is not this happening?

Nowadays, the key economic factors – talent, innovation and creativity – are not found everywhere, they are concentrated in specific areas. The real resource behind economic growth is now the condensing of talent and human productivity. Density enables interaction, interaction between creative skills and talent brings about innovation, and innovation leads to economic growth.

So now the main issue is how to transform the city to make it attractive and in synch with evolving expectations. In this regard, and only because the author of *Urban Beings* takes it as an example in his book, I would like to cite the Plan for the Governance of the Territory of Milan, a project I had the honour of leading as a town-planning councillor back around 2010.

Conventional planning would have started by estimating the number of people expected to be living in the city in the future. This number would then have dictated the number of square metres of housing, services, etc. required. The approach is dirigiste and inherently weak, since anybody who finds what they are looking for is entitled to live in the city.

This is proven by the fact that estimates of the potential number of people living in Milan were (clearly) miscalculated in previous Plans: the 1953 Plan set the figure at 2.5 million inhabitants; and the 1980 variant set a target of 2 million.

I remember we worked on the ‘Big Society’ theory (well thought out but never actually implemented) that David Cameron, then the British Prime Minister, talked about in a speech he made in July 2010 (worth reading in full). He said:

For a long time the way government has worked – top-down, top-heavy, controlling – has frequently had the effect of sapping responsibility, local innovation and civic action.

It has turned many motivated public sector workers into disillusioned, weary puppets of government targets.

It has turned able, capable individuals into passive recipients of state help with little hope for a better future.