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More-than-City, More-than-Human

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Densities of Urbanization

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Abstract

The concentration of human populations in dense settlements, from small towns, to cities, to metropolitan and post-metropolitan formations and diffuse agglomeration zones, lies at the core of the urbanization process. But these high concentrations of people, economic activities, capital, structures, and infrastructures that characterize urban life are impossible to be sustained without a much more geographically extensive web of landscapes of primary production, circulation and waste disposal that form the other side of the urbanization process. In fact, cities due to their high densities, cover no more than 3% of the planetary terrain, while these “other” landscapes that support these high densities, activate more than 70% of the earth’s land surface. In the context of accelerated environmental crises and transition planning efforts, addressing these indirect consequences of urbanization (e.g. pollution, environmental degradation, or biodiversity loss) on more than city, more-than-human landscapes is conditioning the planning of future urban and infrastructural developments. This contribution aims to interrogate the condition of urban density in this broader perspective, illustrating how the densification of human populations in cities, constructs more-than-human densification patterns across more-than-city environments. Specifically, we situate our investigation in the Dutch context and its more-than-city environments. We explore how, in this respect, densification can be conceived as a broader characteristic of the urbanization process, not just the city. Industrial agricultural systems pack plants together in extreme densities, as do large scale Confined Animal Feeding Operations with livestock. We use this framework to examine the country’s long history of agricultural modernization, intensification, and crises, highlighting the convoluted interdependencies between more-than-city landscapes and dense cities. Through historical, conceptual and cartographic exploration, this contribution aims to help reveal the mirror image of urban densities, extending the scope of the conference’s theme of the dense city to include the dense more-than city in planning history..

Keywords

more-than-city, primary production, intensive agriculture, cartography, The Netherlands

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