



A New Paradigm of Human Settlement

The Role of Human Settlements
in Mitigating Climate Change

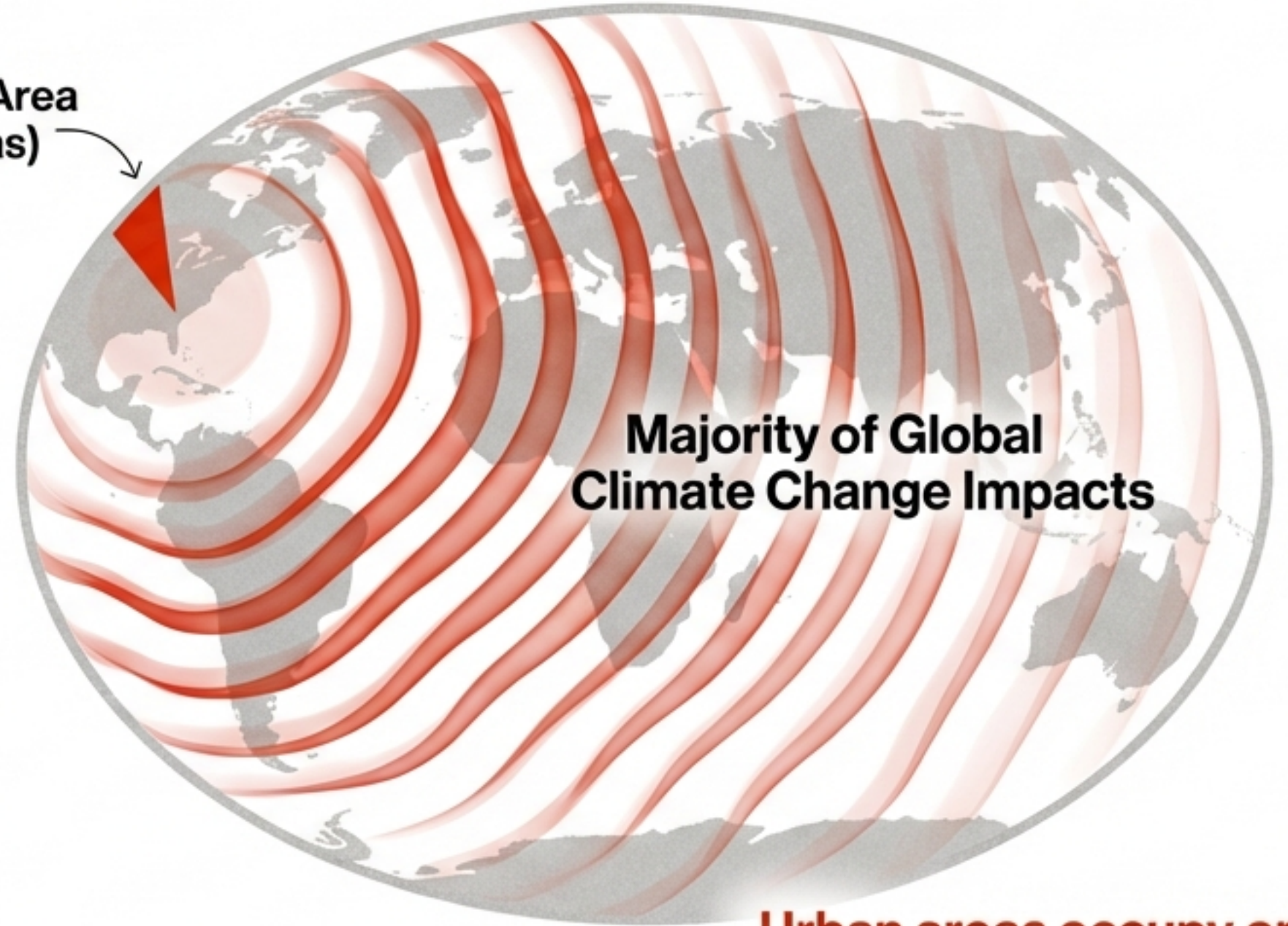
The Industrial Revolution broke the fragile balance between settlement and nature

For centuries, human settlements coexisted in relative balance with their surrounding territories.

The industrial revolution introduced a need for workforce proximity that initiated uncontrolled urbanization.

We accepted this “wild urbanization” as unstoppable, leading to the false belief that infinite density is the only path forward.

2% Surface Area
(Urban Areas)



Urban areas occupy only 2% of the planet's surface yet drive the climate crisis.

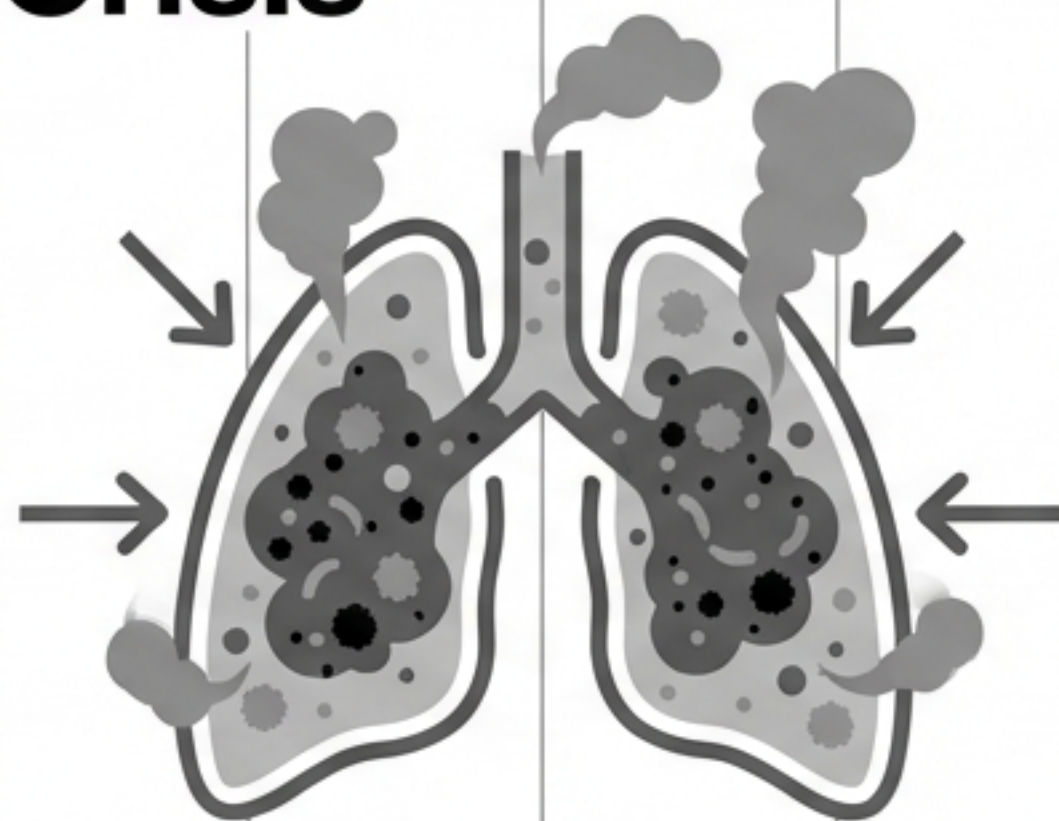
The hidden costs of the 'inevitable' Megacity

Environmental Collapse



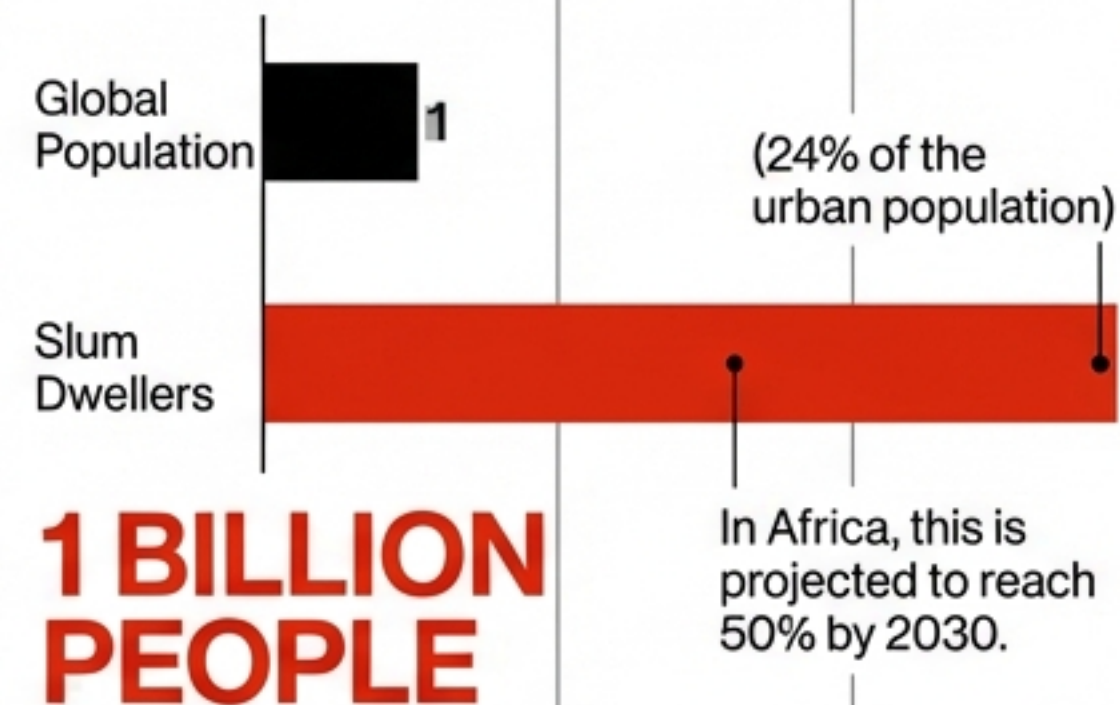
Cities act as “Heat Islands.” Sinking Cities like Manila and Jakarta face existential threats from groundwater extraction and immense building weight.

Social & Health Crisis



13 of the world's 20 most polluted cities are in India. Rising lung diseases affect over 140 million people. The loss of ‘Genius Loci’ erases the sense of belonging.

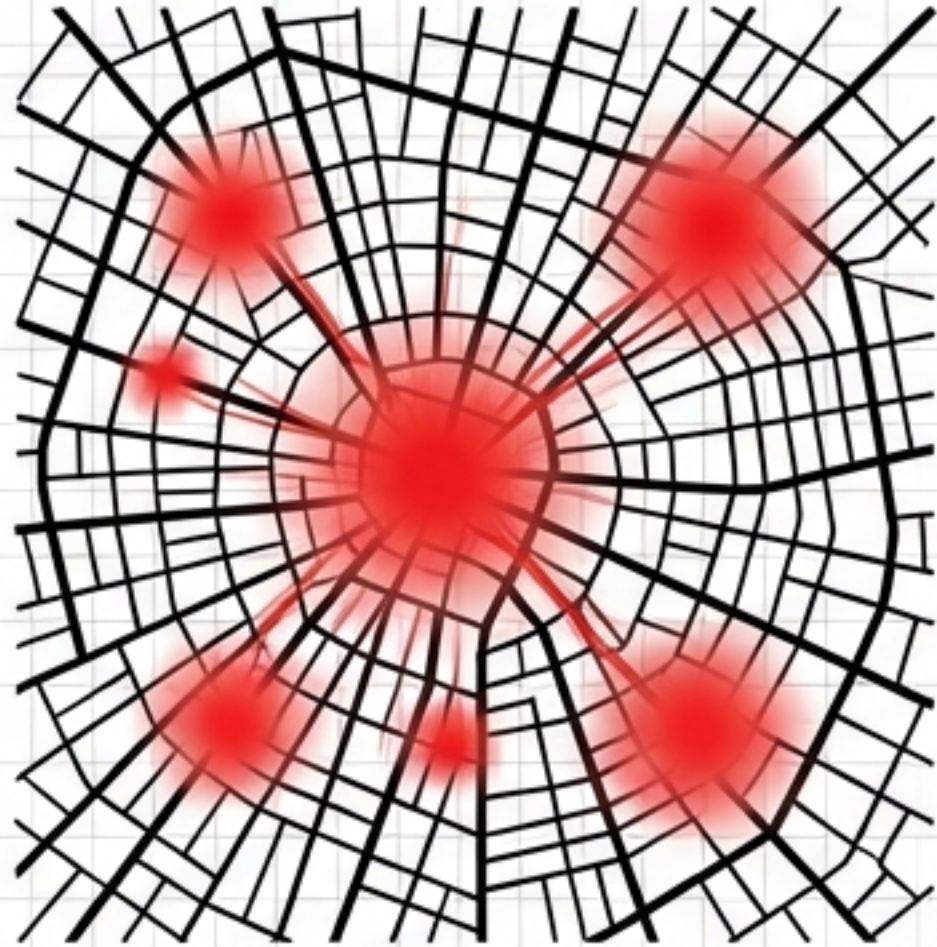
The Slum Crisis



1 billion people live in slums (24% of the urban population). In Africa, this is projected to reach 50% by 2030.

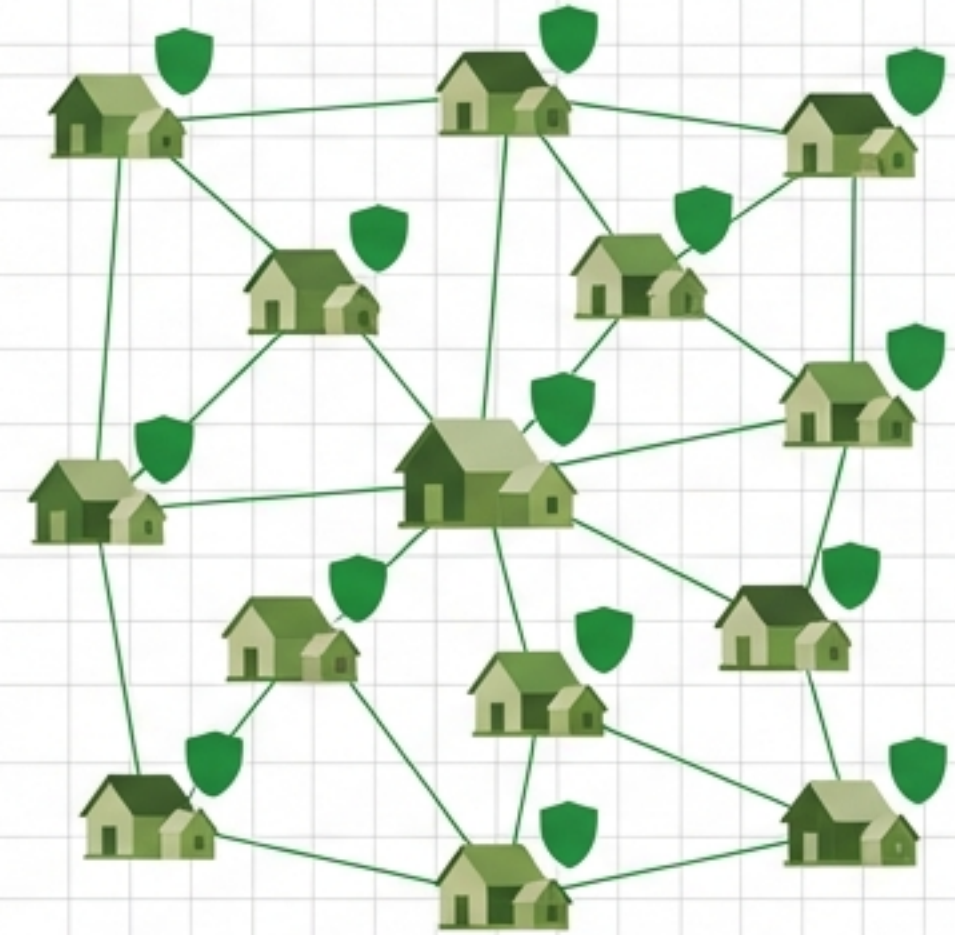
COVID-19 exposed the structural fragility of high-density living

The Trap



Contagion spread fastest in transport hubs and “global cities.” Overcrowding in informal settlements made containment impossible.

The Resilience



Smaller agglomerations allowed for easier containment, monitoring, and social cohesion (solidarity and mutual assistance).

The Lockdown Insight: Reduced anthropic activity heals the environment. Pollution dropped and wildlife returned when the megacity stopped.

‘Smart Cities’ and ‘15-Minute Cities’ are palliative traps, not cures

$$\begin{array}{ccccc} \text{O} & \text{X} & \text{O} & = & \text{O} \\ \text{Technical Fixes} & & \text{Zero Social Quality} & & \text{Zero Progress} \\ \text{(Smart/Compact City)} & & \text{(Alienation/Gentrification)} & & \end{array}$$

Dystopian futures masquerading as Green Progress



“Reminds the canals of Mars, the dead planet.”

- NEOM / The Line (Saudi Arabia): A 170km linear city cutting through the desert, creating an ecological barrier.
- TROJENA: Artificial snow and lakes in a water-scarce environment while natural glaciers disappear.
- OXAGON: Floating industrial hubs proposed while existing coastal cities sink.

The 'Postulates of the Past' are now obsolete

Technology has decoupled proximity from productivity.



Industrial Era: Physical Proximity Required.
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Telemedicine & E-learning:
Services no longer exclusive to the metropolis.



Logistics:
High-speed transport decouples remoteness from isolation.



Remote Work:
Productivity is possible from anywhere.



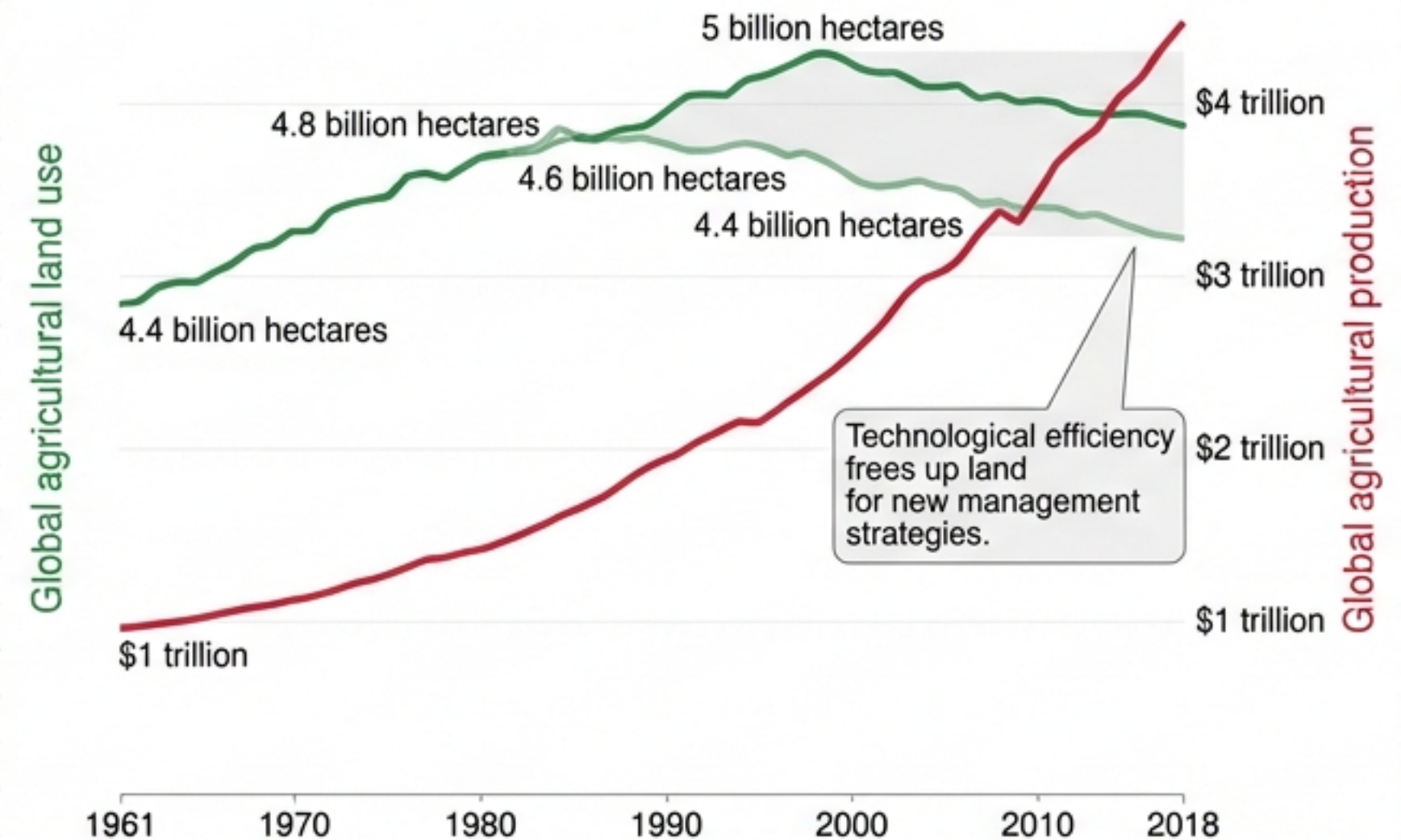
Digital Era: Connectivity without Crowding.
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Moving from the Smart City to the 'Smart Territory'

Definition: A holistic network where minor cities, towns, and villages function as interconnected hubs with standards of living comparable to metropolitan areas.

Goal: To mitigate migration flows toward megacities by making rural life viable, connected, and modern.

Global decoupling of agricultural land and food production



A peak in global pasture land does not mean that it has peaked everywhere. In tropical regions, it continues to increase, often the expense of carbon-rich habitats.
Data source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
OurWorldinData.org – Research and data to make progress against the world's largest problems. Licensed under CC-BY by the author Hannah Ritchie.

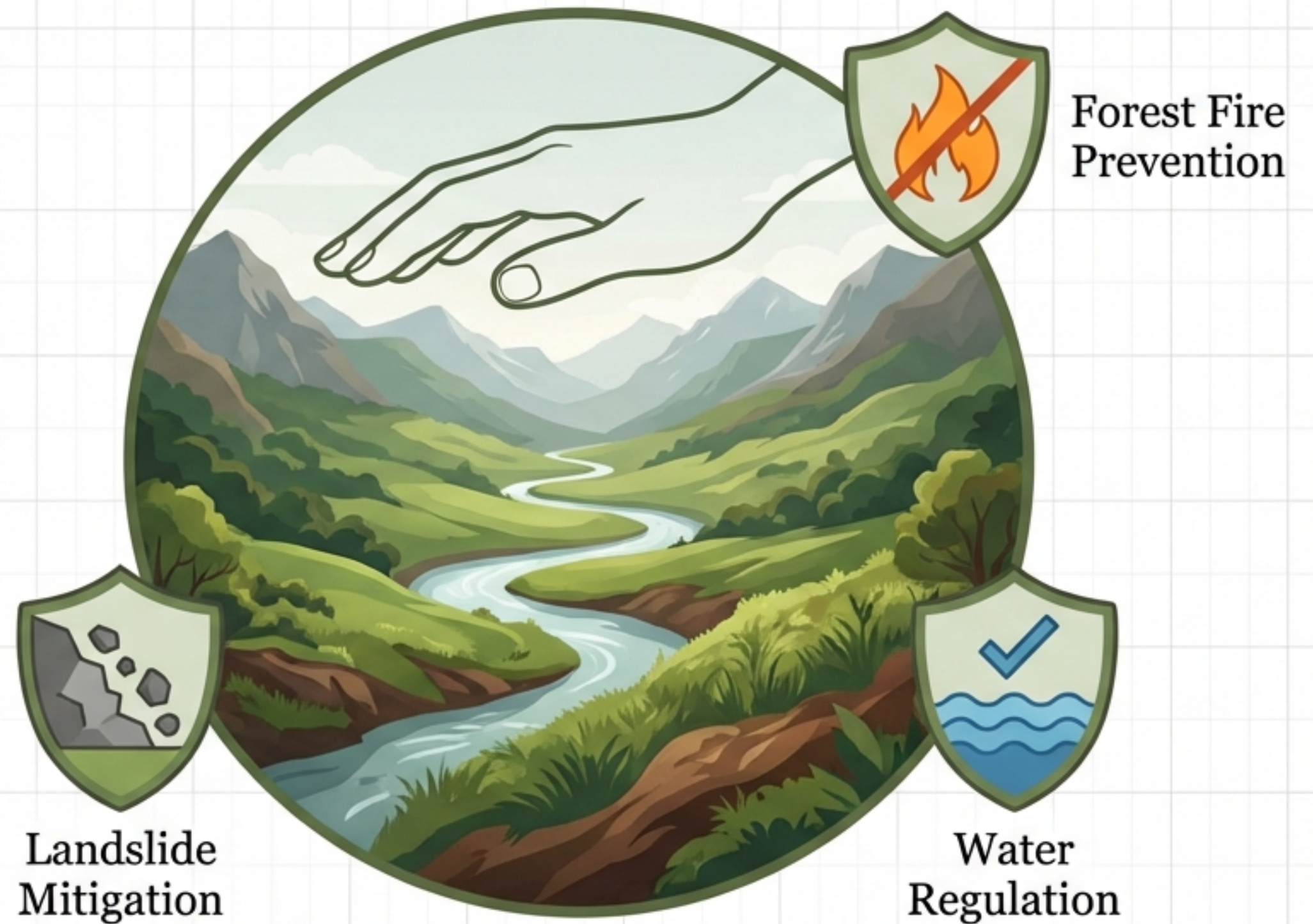
The Concept of the “Human Presidium”

The Problem:

When people leave rural areas for the city, the land is abandoned to unmanaged natural disasters.

The Solution:

Inhabitants act as a “presidium” (guardians). We need people on the land to save the land.



Preserving the Genius Loci and Social Quality

Social Quality Theory (SQT)

1. Socio-economic

Economic security, labor market conditions, income distribution.

2. Socio-political

Political rights, participation, governance quality.

3. Socio-environmental

Environmental quality, sustainability, ecological footprint.

4. Socio-cultural

Cultural identity, heritage, social cohesion, belonging.

A 'Smart Territory' balances all four dimensions. The metropolis often sacrifices culture and environment for economics. Small settlements preserve the Genius Loci—the tangible (monuments) and intangible (traditions) heritage that defines humanity. Unlike the isolation of the metropolis, smaller towns foster solidarity and mutual assistance.

Re-Ruralization is a viable economic model



Circular Economy

Repair, reuse, and recycling activities flourish in local networks, creating small enterprise jobs.



Agriculture 2.0

Technology makes farming less physically arduous, attracting youth back to the land.

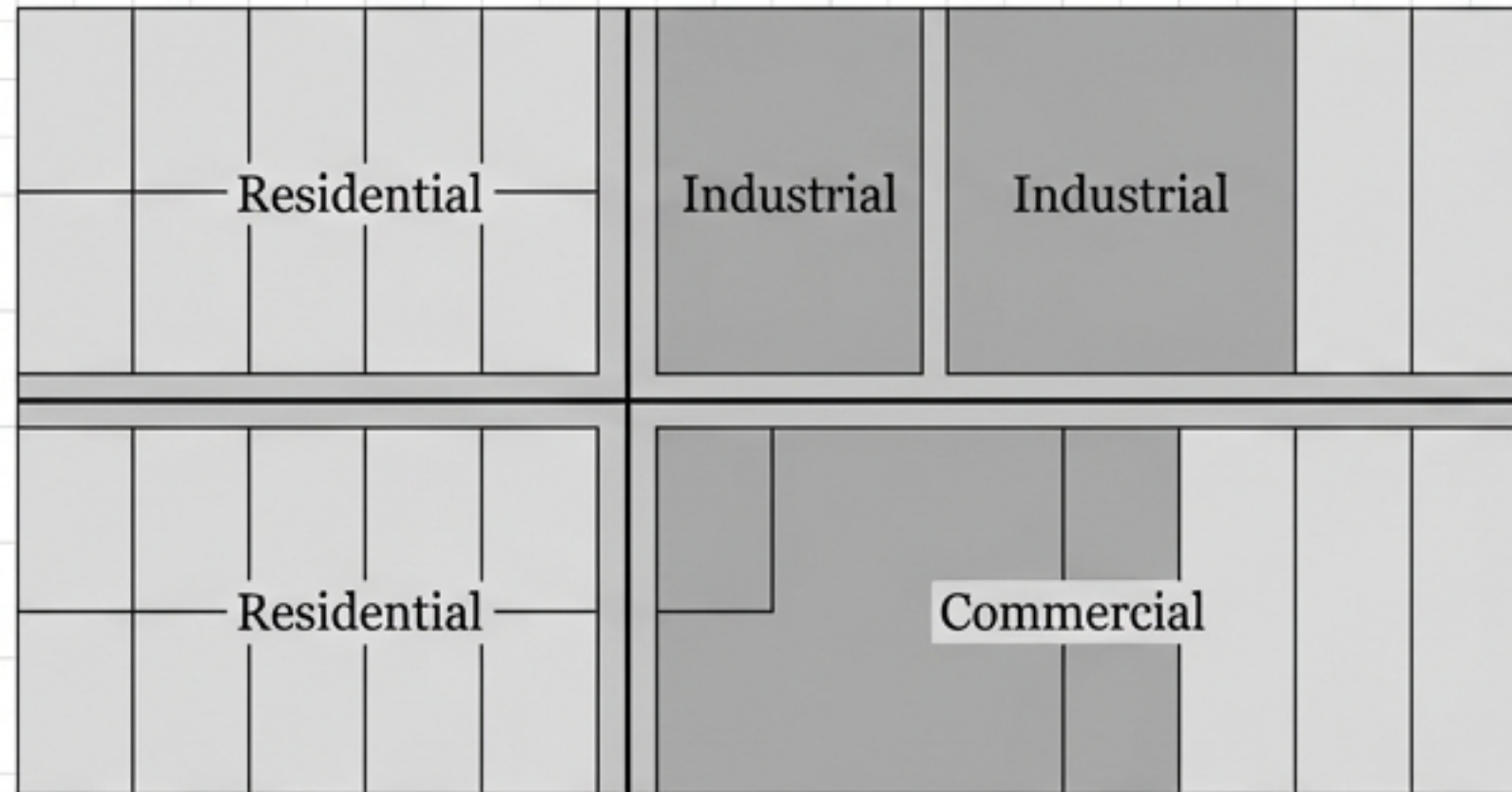


'Welcome to My Village'

Success stories (like ES-VICIS) prove repopulation works by matching urban migrants with local business opportunities.

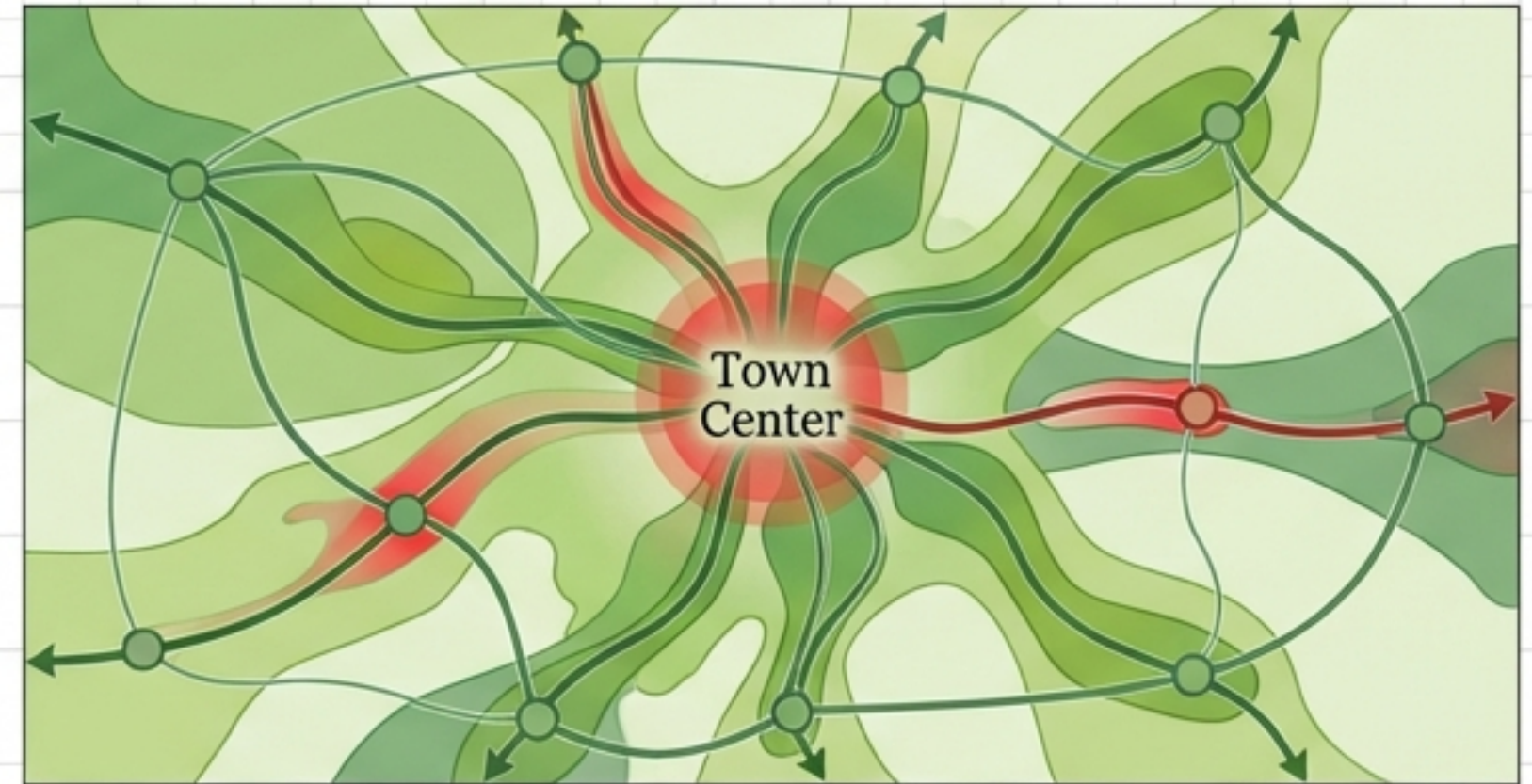
A Roadmap for Policymakers: From Zoning to Holistic Planning

The Old Way: Zoning



Quantitative tools that separate functions and ignore social fabric.

The New Way: Integrated Territorial Planning



- Abandon obsolete “proximity” models.
- Invest in digital infrastructure for **existing** towns.
- Treat urban and rural planning as a single “Smart Territory” framework.

The PAGUS Initiative: A Call for Alternative Governance



Objective: To challenge the current urbanization approach at the UN Summit 2025.



The Manifesto: A formal declaration by academics, experts, and researchers to prioritize 'people-centered urbanization' over market-driven growth.

The PAGUS Action Plan: Five Strategic Pillars

1.

MITIGATE

Climate change impacts via territorial balance.

2.

INTRODUCE

‘Balanced Territorial Development’ as a specific goal (augmenting SDG 11).

3.

HALT

Migration flows to megacities by revitalizing origin settlements.

4.

IMPLEMENT

‘Green’ and ‘circular’ economies in rural areas for local resilience.

5.

SPREAD

Awareness of the urgency to change settlement patterns.

The 'New Normality' is our window to correct 70 years of imbalance

We must choose: a future of alienating megacities or a future of interconnected, human-scale communities that protect the planet.

A Shared Future requires a Human Scale.



Based on the works of Arch. Paolo Motta &
The PAGUS International Scientific Network.