

Maritimity and habitability of large Mediterranean coastal cities

Maritimité et habitabilité des grandes villes littorales méditerranéennes





Habitability : A relevant concept for studying large coastal cities ?

Theoretical introduction and early researches

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I - Introduction :

Origin and first definitions

1) What is Habitability ? :

French :

“Habitabilité” = “Qualité de ce qui est habitable» (Le Robert) / Neologism, 1801

English : Coexistence of several words / spelling

Habitability : “*The quality or fact of being habitable*” (Oxford) / Early 1700s, “natural philosophers”

Liveability / Livability : “*Ability to survive; Fitness for life*” (Oxford) / “*The degree to which a place is suitable or good for living in*” (Cambridge) / 1850 (E. Johnson)

=
A definition that is
not stabilized yet

How habitability can be described and defined in the other languages ?

Spanish / Catalan : Habitabilidad ? (*DEL*) Habitabilitat ? (*GDLC*)

Arab : صلاحية السكن ؟ قابلية السكن ؟

Italian : Abitabilità ? Vivibilità ? (*Treccani*)

2) Use of the concept in the scientific literature ?

● **Storer, 1870** = *“Our cities: their present position and requirements”*

● **1950s** = “Livability” became a **“strong linguistic mechanism”** with “The Electors Action Movement” (TEAM) (*Ley, 1990; Kaal, 2011, Mansour, 2016*)

● **1980s** = A catchphrase in urban studies following **“Liveable Streets”** (*Appleyard, 1981*)

● **1987 / 1992** = Bruntland + Rio = A concept closely linked to sustainability (*Allen 2010; Ruth and Franklin 2013, Gough, 2015a,b*)

● **1999** = B. Clinton and A. Gore “Livability Agenda” (USA) = **Increase of papers dedicated to this topic** (*Herrman & Lewis, 2017*)

● **2010-2020** = A consensus to say that habitability has moved back to **centre stage** in the last decade (*Barrioz & Laslaz, 2025*)

↓
= A concept widely used in urban studies

3) How is habitability defined in the literature ?

Many definitions coexist, both in French and English literature. Here, we focus on 3 general definitions :

Jomehpour, 2015: *“Liveability is the sum of the socio-physical and socio-cultural factors (access to amenities, safety, environmental quality and social cohesion) that can improve and upgrade living standards of any spaces”*

Paul & Sen, 2020: *“A Holistic paradigm of human development and community well-being”*

Barrioz & Laslaz, 2025: *“the ability of human beings to inhabit a liveable space and to adapt to the conditions they deem necessary for their overall well-being and health”*

4) A fuzzy concept ?

Despite various definitions ...

... We face several limitations of current conceptualizations of livability
(Gough, 2015a)

The previous slide show this concept encompasses many factors ...

- Some have an **objective** dimension (*e.g. access to healthcare, food and physical safety, etc.*)
- But most are **subjective** (*landscape amenities, living together, etc.*)
- Or depend on **local political conditions** (*public transport, design of public spaces, etc.*).

... And different scales :

- Home,
- Streets,
- Neighbourhoods,
- Cities,
- Regions ...



Why refer to
habitability?

5) A pragmatic approach to sustainability ?

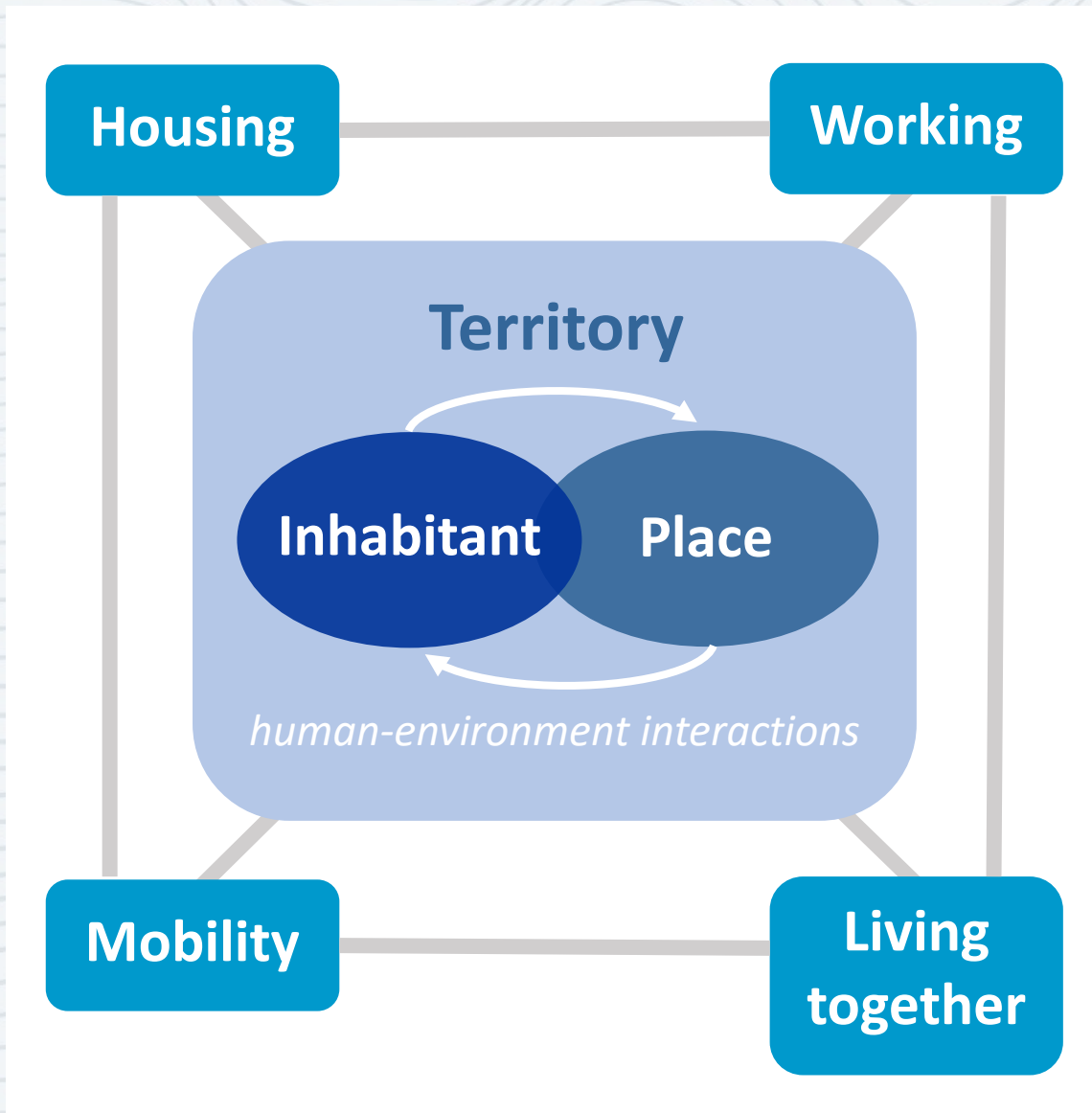
Despite these limits =

- Liveability = **a pragmatic implementation of the sustainability** (*Gough, 2015a,b; Zhan et al., 2018*) = *“liveability offers a way to translate sustainability into a context that relates more closely to interventions”*

- **Particularity adapted to small geographic areas** (*Pacione 1990, 2003; Portney 2013*) -> e.g. = cities and their metropolitan areas

= **Many works fall within the field of urban studies** : *from biochemists interested in water quality, to sociologists concerned with community use, to urban planners interested in the design of public spaces (...)*

- Various systemic and integrated indices to assess the habitability of cities **based on the three components of sustainability** -> using ecological, social and economic factors (*Higgs et al., 2019, 2022; Gilles-Corti, 2022; Dadpour et al., 2024...*)



« Modes d'habiter » : schematic illustration inspired by N. Mathieu (2007)

6) « Modes d'habiter » : A relevant framework for habitability ?

- A theoretical framework carried by **Nicole Mathieu** (1996, 2007, 2014 ...)
- **A systemic vision:** a concept that studies both **the biophysical reality** of the territory and **its social component**
- A broader idea of living than just “*inhabiting a given place*” : it includes housing, mobility, working and living together = **key variables to assess a place habitability**
- **Linked to the habitability** of the urban environments (Hucy et al., 2005 in Mathieu & Guernond, 2005)

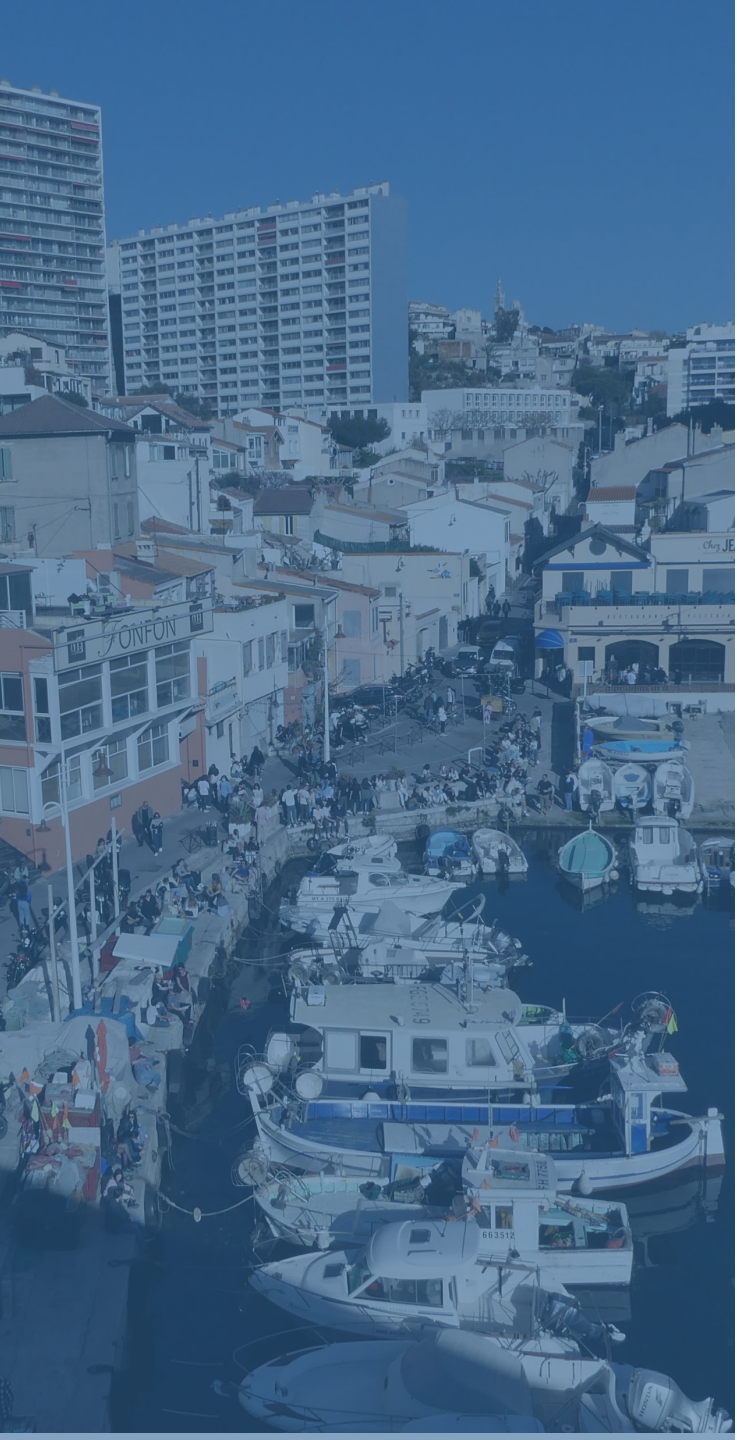


II - First researches : *What about large coastal cities habitability ?*

1) Coastal influence

How does the sea affect the habitability of coastal cities ?

- Coastal risks (erosion, submersion, flooding)
 - Environmental impact of maritime traffic (*air quality, cruises, road traffic, etc ...*)
 - Key to the economic development of these cities (*jobs linked to the port, tourism, fishing, etc ...*)
 - Influences local climate (*e.g. during heat waves*)
 - Physical and visual connection with a natural element / A popular landscape in western countries
 - Coastal areas conducive to physical activities, resourcing, social practices
- ➡ Are these points addressed by researches dealing with large coastal cities habitability?



2) Systematic literature review

Goals linked to this review :

- Do large coastal cities receive **special attention** in liveability researches?
- If so, how are their **coastal and maritime dimensions** integrated ?

Keyword cross-searches on the WOS + Identifying papers dedicated to coastal towns (national stats) + **Analysis grid**

Very first results / 128 papers

- Coastal dimension not taken into account = a context, not included to the variables
- ... Despite various « **integrated indices** »
- **Sectorial approaches** : *social practice, water quality, public transportation efficiency ...* = **Habitability not always treated as a whole**

Thank you
for your
attention



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Appendix : First methodological approach

Description of the study field

Sustainability

Integrated ?

Modes d'habiter

G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T
Journal	PDF	Study field	City	Metrop.	Coastal ?	Integrated Approach ?	Bio.	Soc.	Eco.	H.	W.	T.	CL.
d Sustainab	Oui	Barcelona			DC			X				X	
Internati	Oui	Helsinki, Melbourne			DC			X					X
d Urban Po	Oui	Melbourne			DC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
ic Internati	Oui	Melbourne			DC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
De Health &	Oui	Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane,			DC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
& ICONARP	Oui	Auckland, Copenhagen			DC		X	X		X			X
, Global He	Oui	Bangkok			DC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
m NPJ Urba	Oui	Melbourne			DC			X	X	X	X	X	
, Urban Po	Oui	Cairns			DC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ecology a	Oui	Rotterdam, Helsinki, New-York			DC	X	X	X	X				
ra Trasporti	Oui	Catania			DC		X	X				X	
's Environm	Oui	Marseille, Athènes, Palerme, C			DC			X					X
e Case Stud	Oui	Copenhagen			DC		X	X				X	
Housing S	Oui	Oslo			DC		X	X		X			X
ei European	Oui	Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Den H			DC			X				X	
gi Applied R	Oui	Malaga, Bilbao, Palma, Barcel			DC			X	X	X	X		
, Internati	Oui	Bangkok			DC								
L Sustainab	Oui	Amsterdam			DC			X	X			X	X

First analysis grid

Analysis grid :

Use of an analysis grid to define how habitability and the sea are addressed

Frameworks : Sustainability + Modes d'habiter
(Housing, Working, Transp., Community Life)

Cross keywords:

Topic	Liveability	Livability	Habitability	Sustainable	Life
Urban	116	?	16		
Urban + Coastal	2	?	?	?	
Cit*	?	?	?	?	
Coastal Cit*	?	?	10	52	
Coastal	10	?	62		35