

A Comparative Study of Settlement Forms and Environmental Adaptation in Venusia and the Lowland Maya

Xiangyi Li

College of Letters and Science, University of California, Davis, USA
Email: xysli@ucdavis.edu

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Abstract

Settlement morphological and environmental adaptation are also the core aspects of human-environment relationships; nevertheless, cross-cultural comparative research regarding the ways various civilizations structured space and adapted to ecological limitations are still very few. This study fills this gap by conducting a comparative study of two very different civilizations that existed in the world on very different grounds: the Roman colonial city of Venusia in southern Italy (founded 291 BC) and the lowland Maya civilization of Central America (peak 250 - 900 AD). This paper is a reconstruction of Mediterranean and tropical settlement patterns and environmental adaptation methods using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) technology. The comparison shows that there were some fundamental differences in the urban structure: Venusia was characterized by centralized compact urbanism, orthogonality in planning, a hierarchy of three settlement tiers, and a government-led infrastructure, whereas the Maya were characterized by dispersed low-density urbanism, organic settlement patterns determined by water availability, and competitive multi-centered political structure. Correspondingly, strategies of environmental adaptation had diverged: Venusia used an institutional model of adaptation which entailed top-down coordination of the state to mobilize the engineering capacity to build aqueducts and systematic agricultural colonization, while the Maya used a model of socio-technical adaptation which entailed community-based innovation to create complex networks of reservoirs, a variety of agricultural strategies and environmental response to environmental changes. Nevertheless, in spite of these dramatic differences, the two civilizations attained plenty of concentration of the population and long-term sustainability, which just proves that there are several ways to organize human settlements and govern relations with the en-

vironment. This comparative framework opposes environmental determinism and admits ecological constraints, which shows that human agency acting at various scales with specific institutional configurations is the key factor in the processes of adaptation. The study offers methodological models on how researches on cross-cultural settlement can be conducted over the next few years and also offers historical insights that can be used in the current debate surrounding sustainable urbanism, climate adaptation, and the various approaches that human societies can adopt to negotiate through the complex systems of socio-ecological environment.

Keywords

Settlement Archaeology, Environmental Adaptation, GIS and Lidar, Roman Colonization, Maya Urbanism

1. Introduction

Settlement form and environmental adaptation have become fundamental issues in archaeological studies in the sense that it is an aggregation of complex interaction of human society and the natural environment. Civilization All throughout human history, there has been a stunning diversity of the place in which people lived, spatial structure, and the use of environmental resources, which is the reflection of the complex interplay between the social system, technological possibilities, and ecological limitations. According to research, the fact that ancient people adjusted their settlement patterns to dissimilar environmental settings is an important information that can shed light on the so-called complex socio-ecological systems, which defined human societies of the past (Denham, 2024). The time-geographical aspect of human action has assumed a more central role in archaeological interest, but even though more and more archaeologists acknowledge its significance, the number of cross-cultural comparative analyses investigating patterns of settlement at various civilizations is extremely small. Majority of the available studies have concentrated on a single area or specific cultural situations thus creating huge gaps in our knowledge of how various societies reacted to the same environmental stresses or how similar social systems appeared in various ecological environments.

The imperative to connect settlement archaeology with environmental studies has become especially urgent in the shadow of the modern issues of sustainability. Recent studies have shown that archaeological information can help shed light on how previous civilizations dealt with environmental limitations, evolved methods of adaptation, and reached their sustainability to a greater or lesser extent. The extensive study of more than 47,500 houses on 2990 archaeological sites over an ecological span of 10,000 years by Lawrence et al. demonstrates that complex adaptive strategies are associated with settlement persistence and not with simple

environmental determinism (Lawrence et al., 2025). This result contradicts previous suppositions and confirms the need to analyze settlement patterns using a variety of analytical approaches. Moreover, as Burke et al. point out, it is also the practical viability of the study of ancient settlement adaptation to current environment-related issues and concerns that the long-term existence of our species, as well, depends on our capability to utilize culture as a tool of solving the contemporary sustainability dilemmas (Burke et al., 2021). The combination of enhanced analytical technologies has transformed our ability to examine these associations, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and remote sensing applications have given us tools like never before to carry out spatial analysis and cross-regional comparisons. According to a recent bibliometric research, it is shown that the volume of GIS applications in heritage research has grown exponentially, where spatial analysis becomes one of the major research topics along with the cultural heritage conservation and sustainable development (Huang, 2024).

This paper fills the research gap identified by performing a detailed comparative study of two historical civilizations which acted in strikingly different environmental conditions: the Roman colonial city of Venusia, in southern Italy and the lowland Maya civilization of Central America. The cases were not chosen simply due to their archaeological goodness, but due to the representativeness of an opposite type of settlement organization and environment adjustment which help to clarify the main questions of the relations between humans and the environment. The Roman colony of Venusia created in 291 BC is an example of the Mediterranean custom of organized urbanization with the centralized governance and the geometrical structure and the colonization of lands by the state authorities. However, the lowland Maya which attained the peak during the Classical period (250 - 900 AD) built large urban centers within a tropical setting characterized by seasonal water shortage and the lack of perennial rivers. This study will seek to develop an analytical framework by systematically comparing these cases in order to highlight both general patterns and context-specific differences in the way the civilizations have organized their settlements and adjusted to the environmental limitations.

The importance of such comparative approach stretches in various dimensions. On an academic level, this paper helps to fill the gap in the cross-cultural settlement research by showing that systematic comparison can allow identifying the underlying principles of human spatial organization without overlooking the originality of the particular cultural contexts. Theoretically, the study demonstrates the possible methodological applications of modern spatial analysis tools, especially, the GIS and LiDAR technologies to reconstruct the landscape of ancient settlements, as well as interpret the environmental connections of settlements. According to Huang et al., these technologies have become necessary in the integration of spatial and attribute data of heritage sites, which researchers can use to model intricate dependencies between settlements, topography, hydrology, and resource distribution (Huang, 2024). Lastly, on the practical level, the given

investigation sheds light on the history of modern-day discussion of sustainable development, city planning, and human reaction to environmental limitations. Studies in the recent times of informal settlement patterns investigated in the Global South indicated that archaeological record of dispersed, low-density urban forms were very challenging to the contemporary assumptions of sustainable city development and that archaeological record of the persistence and, arguably, sustainability of this generic urban spatial morphology in the tropics may not be better relatively (Sulas & Isendahl, 2025). Through a study of the ways in which Venesia and the lowland Maya people could pattern their settlements and deal with environmental challenges, this study provides sources of insight into contemporary debates concerning the nature of resilience, adaptation, and the multiplicity of ways in which human communities can become long-term sustainable in different environmental and social contexts.

2. Literature Review

The shift of settlement archaeology toward the advanced spatial analysis, as opposed to the earlier descriptive classification of sites, can be regarded as one of the most drastic changes that have taken place in the field of archaeological practice throughout the last decades. Settlement research has increasingly shifted away not only the study of particular locations but to research that is more regional and provides a contextualized understanding of urban patterns in the larger spatial associations that include rural settlement, agricultural regions and transport systems. This change is what has been called by scholars as a change in site-centric to landscape-centric understandings, in which settlements are not taken to be isolated, but rather they are nodes in a complex socio-spatial system. Recent studies have shown that an analysis of settlement pattern, in conjunction with ethnographic and environmental data, can help researchers to examine shifts in the size of settlements in the context of carrying capacities of landscapes and other environmental factors, thus producing information on the patterns in demography, settlement hierarchies, and the formation of intricate sociopolitical organizations (Hein, 2022). Although refined and subtle now, the theoretical underpinnings of the early cultural evolutionists still guide the modern comparative analysis of development of civilization, especially in the issue of how various societies coped with a shift in dispersed to nucleated forms of settlement.

The connection between environmental adjustment and social organization has become one of the subjects of main but controversial archeological studies that has brought about persistent arguments on determinism and human agency in the design of settlement patterns. The modern research world has decisively left behind simplistic environmental determinism in favor of more complex models that acknowledge the recursive and mutually structuring quality of human-environment relationships. Environmental archaeology is a field of interest, as recent studies argue, with the multi-dimensional nature of human-environment relationships, i.e., how human activities were shaped by their environments and vice

versa (Denham, 2024). This two-way view recognizes that although environment limitations were admitted to have played a significant role in the strategies that people used to settle and exploit resources, human communities were also actively altering their landscapes through technology advancement and social structures. The climate-disaster-response model has been especially useful in terms of interpreting how environmental stress influenced prehistoric settlement patterns, exposing that mid-Holocene climate unpredictability, specifically in the shape of stepped up flooding and environmental pressure, precipitated adaptive responses including those of elevation movement and spatial differentiation (Zhou et al., 2025). Such processes combined with new sociopolitical forms, made early complex societies possible, and have shown that environmental pressures tended to drive instead of limit social evolution. In addition, new theoretical developments combine ideas of complex systems science to bridge the divide between global climatic processes and local-level social processes, directly relying on the spatio-temporal organization of the environment alongside the significance of social context and history-specific contingency in the ultimate results of human-environment interactions (Zhou et al., 2025).

The adoption of the high-tech development of spatial analysis, namely Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) has transformed the field of settlement archaeology by creating the possibility of greater precision in mapping, analyzing and interpreting ancient landscapes. The use of LiDAR technology that can access understorey of forests and show archaeological sites that are not visible under the traditional remote sensing technologies has created, according to scholars, a paradigm shift in settlement archaeology especially in densely wooded areas where traditional survey methods have been found to be insufficient (Chase et al., 2012). The use of this technological revolution has allowed archaeologists to determine whole settlement systems on scales that were not possible before, showing, not just the individual buildings, but the entire space relationship of settlements, agricultural features, transport systems, and topography. The increasing number of datasets in high-resolution LiDAR, with point-densities approaching 15 - 20 points per square meter, has presented new possibilities to archaeological prospection, as well as to landscape reconstruction (Caspari, 2023). Other methodological developments in the recent past integrate LiDAR-created terrain models with archaeological, geological, and soil data to profile settlement sites with great accuracy and perceive sites in their environmental contexts. In addition, prediction models that are spatially explicit have helped researchers to analyze the settlement patterns in various chronological periods using point process modeling, Maximum entropy modeling and Generalized Additive Models to determine correlations between settlement distribution and environmental factors such as elevation, slope, soil type and hydrology (Rostamirad & Naghshineh, 2025). Such methodological developments have not only enhanced feature recognition but have also made possible more elaborate comparative analysis across places and time. Nevertheless, the recent accelerated

growth in spatial analysis technology has brought important issues about the methodology, such as the necessity to comprehend the scale effects, the quality of the data, and the over-interpretation possibility of the GIS-based landscape archaeology (Inomata, 2024). The question of how to incorporate these strong analytical instruments with theoretically based interpretive models that explain adequately both environmental limitations and human agency is, as settlement archaeology is still evolving, the challenge facing it as well as not resorting to reductionist explanations and maintaining methodological rigor at the same time.

3. Case Study I: Settlement Structure and Environmental Context of Venusia (Italy)

Venusia, the Roman colonial city, is an example of planned Mediterranean urbanism, as it helps to realize that state-directed colonization could influence the morphology of settlements and their adaptation to the environment. This case uses systematic GIS analysis of archaeological data to reconstruct the spatial development of Venusia, on the basis of foundational imperial policy, local geography and settlement organization.

3.1. Geographical and Historical Background

As a Latin colony, founded in 291 BC, Venusia occupied a highland strategic location in southern Italy, 400 - 550 meters above sea level, overlooking the Ofanto River valley, and controlling transport routes connecting the Adriatic coast and the interior areas. This placement reflected Roman imperial tactic of focusing on places that had defensive strengths, agricultural possibilities and control over communication routes. Venusia was one of the first colonies, established following the Third Samnite War with around 20,000 colonists and was a formidable population and military force in the formerly indigenous Italic states.

The colony was interrelated, with the military purpose of a strategic garrison, the administrative purpose of a seat of Roman authority which projected legal and political structures, and the economical purpose of the exploitation of the agricultural resources of the area under the allocation of land to Roman citizens. The mixture of GIS analysis and archaeological studies has made it possible to reconstruct the Venusian environmental landscape, and in this way, topography has been shown to affect the choice of site and the development of cities.

3.2. Settlement Form

The morphology of Venusia is an example of Roman colony planning which had highly regularized space structure as a result of ideological obsessions with order and rational land division. The grid system was orthogonal with right-angled streets, which formed a grid consisting of square insulae of equal sizes. Central insulae contained public areas such as forum, temples and administration buildings, supporting the center of civic life, and residential quarters, workshops and commercial facilities surrounded them, with some evidence suggesting a socioec-

onomic distinction between neighborhoods of the city.

Settlement hierarchy did not only limit itself in the urban core, but spread to the rural networks. The GIS map demonstrates three levels of organization, the colonial city as the main center, secondary urban centers (*vici*) 3 - 5 kilometers away and scattered farmsteads (*villae*) on the farmland. This was a response to the Roman centuriation system-system of dividing and distributing conquered land. Survey evidence points to the rural settlements being at good agricultural locations and transportation where the villages were on high defensive sites and the farmsteads were on the valley floors and on the slopes between the hills and the valleys that could be cultivated.

This system was incorporated in transportation infrastructure. Primary roads linked Venusia to Via Appia and coastal cities and secondary roads linked urban center and the rural villages. This system enabled movement of military forces, communication of the administration and transfer of agricultural products with road location adjusting to the terrain along ridges and valleys to ensure connectivity throughout the settlement hierarchy.

3.3. Environmental Adaptation

The environment adaptation of Venusia was determined by the Mediterranean conditions of the ecological environment, Roman agricultural technology, and the Roman empire land management. Site selection was an advanced reaction to limitations and possibilities: the position on highland offered drainage, minimized the risk of disease and defensive advantages, and the close location to Ofanto Valley offered the availability of water and rich alluvial soil.

The elevated location was dependent on water management. Archaeological data show that there was the construction of cisterns, aqueducts and underground waterways that were used to collect, store and distribute water in the city. The same strategies were used in small scale in rural settlements. The water storage requirement to accommodate the dry summers required by the Mediterranean seasonal precipitation led to the scale of water infrastructure and agricultural activities.

The biophysical Mediterranean traits of agriculture included hot dry summer, mild wet winter, and irregular rainfall. Centuriation helped in the systematic distribution of land of different quality. Mixed agriculture involving cereal farming on the valley bottoms, viticulture and olive farming on the hilly sides and animal grazing is indicated on the upland pastures. This diversification minimized risk on crops that had various needs and harvests, which is a classic example of institutional environmental adaptation, state-administered organizational systems that influence the relationship between humans and the environment by surveying technology, legal framework, and investing in infrastructures.

4. Case Study II: Settlement Patterns and Environmental Strategies of the Lowland Maya (Mexico)

The lowland Maya culture is a considerably different story of settlement structure

and ecological adaptation, which featured vast, low-density urban systems built in the difficult ecological environment of tropical Central America. The recent LiDAR-based research has completely changed the way Maya settlements are perceived and understood, revealing otherwise unseen landscape attributes and showing the advanced spatial structure behind what has been perceived as dispersed rural settlements by previous researchers. This case study will explore the ways that the Maya were able to build elaborate urban centers and adjust to environmental limitations that were dramatically different to those of the Mediterranean.

4.1. Geographical and Historical Background

The Maya lowlands cover around 250,000 square kilometers of the Yucatan peninsula and other parts of Mexico, Guatemala and Belize with tropical climates and well defined wet and dry seasons and lack of permanent rivers in a significant area. The geological background is mainly made of karst limestone and forms a topography in which the surface water is limited and the drainage is through underground cave formations. Precipitation is about 1500 - 3000 millimeters each year, though it is highly seasonal and causes acute water shortage during the dry season (November-May) when there are periods when rainfall is virtually absent in a month. This hydrological regime challenged the basics of a close human habitation since communities needed a constant source of water throughout the year but instead, they were confronted with the environment in which surface water was temporary.

The Maya civilization lived in the Preclassic period (2000 BC-250 AD) though peaked in the Classic period (250 - 900 AD), when the large urban centers, such as Tikal, Calakmul, and Caracol, populated in the tens of thousands. Instead of Roman colonial growth that created Venesia, Maya urbanism was created by local demographic convergence, centralization of politics, and the construction of monuments. At the end of the Classic period (600 - 900 AD) dozens of large urban centers in the Maya lowlands were linked to each other by political alliances, trade networks, and periodical warfare. The culture showed impressive power in creating intensive urbanism in an environment most would view as marginal to massive settlement, a challenge to considerable environmental expertise and adaptive technologies.

Archaeological studies according to the traditional ground survey grossly underestimated the magnitude and density of Maya residential area since the tropical vegetation hindered surface identification and visibility. The use of airborne LiDAR technology starting in the early 2000s has changed the knowledge on the Maya landscapes by going through the forest cover and discovering vast networks of buildings, agricultural alterations, water management systems, and causeways linking city centers. With these finds the Maya lowlands have proved to have sustained much larger populations than before thought, in systems of settlement of a striking spatial complexity.

4.2. Settlement Form

The morphology of Maya urban areas was substantially different than the orthogonal planning of Roman colonial cities, and in fact has been labeled by researchers as the so-called low-density urbanism (large settlement areas with scattered residential buildings around compact ceremonial and administrative centres). Large cities were characterized by large-scale architecture and stepped pyramids, complexes of palaces, ball courts, and plazas that were formed based on astronomical orientations and cosmological principles as opposed to geometric regularity. The ceremonial cores were frequently several square kilometers in size and were the centre of political power, religious rites and residence of the elite. These cores were architectural and spatially concentrated which was centralized, and signified the significance of the centralized power and the significance of the public ceremony in the political culture of the Maya.

These cores were surrounded by residential areas, which formed extensive spaces, and LiDAR surveys have shown that the settlement is advancing dozens of square kilometers around cities. These areas had platforms that carried perishable superstructures (houses) which were interspersed with kitchen gardens, small agricultural plots, and open spaces. The density of population in these residential areas, although not quite at the high level of small cities of preindustrial periods, was however urban by the standards of contemporary archaeology 500 - 1000 persons per km², and sometimes even more. The scattered form of settlement was a manifestation of agricultural policies (family production in kitchen gardens) and environmental factors (like water accessibility).

The geographical arrangement of the Maya population showed advanced reaction to the topography and the water systems. According to LiDAR data it was found that residential concentrations matched well with areas that provided access to water such as natural depressions (bajos) that retained water seasonally, areas where bedrock was close to the surface enabling well to be dug, and areas where modified reservoirs could be set up. This trend implies that the availability of water was the main determinant of settlements distribution, and the settlements concentrated in areas that had good water supply during the dry season. Furthermore, LiDAR has shown large systems of causeways linking great centers and that settlement clusters were, in fact, interconnected urban networks.

The Maya lowland settlement hierarchy does not work in the Roman model of territory. Instead of one dominant center dominating an agricultural hinterland by establishing direct colonial rule, the Maya system was characterized by a number of competing centers of different size that were involved in dynamic political relations. Larger capitals controlled the networks of smaller centers in the region by tributary relationships, political marriage and military superiority but this was frequently challenged and changed with time. This political organization was also manifested in the settlement pattern where each center had a monumental core, residential areas and agricultural hinterland, which built a landscape of overlapping and competing territorial systems.

4.3. Environmental Adaptation

The environmental adaptation of Maya was the reaction to the tropical lowland difficulties, especially the shortage of water during some seasons in high-rainfall land of poorly developed karst. One of the most important dimensions was water management, and people created economical systems of water capture, storage and distribution. The archaeological studies report on large systems of reservoirs, channels and altered aguadas. Hundreds of thousands of cubic meters were stored in reservoirs, usually lined with plaster to minimize seepage, and used to supply rateable amounts of water to dense population in the dry season. LiDAR exposes numerous centers with numerous connected reservoirs in place to harness plaza and platform run-offs, making constructed spaces water-catching structures.

The degree of water management and level of sophistication depended on the region, indicating the conditions in the area. Regions of seasonal bajos were put into use as wet-season farmlands and possible dry-season water tablets. The communities living in Northern Yucatan used natural cenotes and wells to obtain groundwater. The development of water infrastructure was directly proportional to the size of settlements, with large centers holding large reservoir networks and small communities using less advanced technologies.

There was agricultural adaptation as manifested through tropical opportunities and constraints. Extensive and intensive Maya farming was practised according to environmental zones. Swidden farming continued to be used in large-scale maize production using multi-year rotation, although, in contrast to previous expectations, there were also intensive characteristics, particularly terraced slopes, raised wetland paddies, and continuously cultivated domestic gardens. These high-density systems, which demanded much labor, but yielded consistent results, sustained high-density LiDAR-recorded populations. Spatial distribution involves advanced environmental understanding and various strategies are implemented depending on the local soil, hydrology and topography.

Another important dimension was forest management. The Maya lowlands demanded timber in large quantities, which was used in construction, fuel and crafts. The evidence of palaeoecological shows that it has been highly modified in the form of forest around major centers, but also evidence shows that communities have continued to keep their forest resources productive through selective harvesting, the preservation of useful species, and forest gardens. The Terminal Classic decline (800 - 900 AD) entailed the environmental conditions especially drought. Paleoclimatic records show that there were several extreme droughts that put a strain on water management system on which the vast populations relied. Nevertheless, the stress-social collapse links between the environment and social issues were multifold and politicized with regional variation differences highlighting that environmental adaptation is a socio-technical system whereby the political organization, social resilience, and environmental knowledge interact to produce results as shown [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Comparative overview of Venusia and lowland maya settlement systems.

Characteristic	Venusia (Roman Colony)	Lowland Maya
Foundation	291 BC	Developed over millennia (apex 250 - 900 AD)
Climate	Mediterranean (hot dry summers, mild wet winters)	Tropical (seasonal wet/dry)
Urban Planning	Orthogonal grid, centralized	Dispersed low-density around ceremonial centers
Population Density	High density, compact	Low-density (500 - 1000/km ²)
Settlement Hierarchy	Three-tier (city-village-farmstead)	Multi-center competitive
Water Management	Aqueducts, cisterns	Reservoir systems, aguadas, cenotes
Agriculture	Mediterranean mixed farming	Swidden, terracing, raised fields
Primary Constraint	Highland water supply	Seasonal water scarcity in karst
Social Organization	State-directed colonial	Decentralized political competition
Transportation	Roman road network	Sacbeob causeways
Adaptation Model	Institutional (state-organized)	Socio-technical (community-based)

5. Integrated Comparison of Settlement Morphology and Ecological Strategies

The comparison with Venusia and the Maya of the lowlands helps to see the basic difference in the modes of arrangement of settlements and adaption of the environment constrained by the environmental factors, but it throws light on universal tendencies in human space organization. This is an analysis that summarizes the results in the field of settlement morphology, environmental adaptation strategies, models of socio-environmental interactions, and cross-cultural implications.

5.1. Comparison of Settlement Patterns

The patterns of settlement in Venusia and Maya settlement are opposite methods of structure of cities as in **Figure 1**. The example of Venusia is an example of the centralized compact urbanism, which is high density, well-defined borders, orthogonal planning, and centralized hierarchical structure. This structure repre-

sented Roman ideological engagements with order and control over the state and the urban grid was symbolically used to represent imperial power. The hierarchy of settlement was based upon direct administrative control with the villages and farmsteads being like satellites to the urban center.

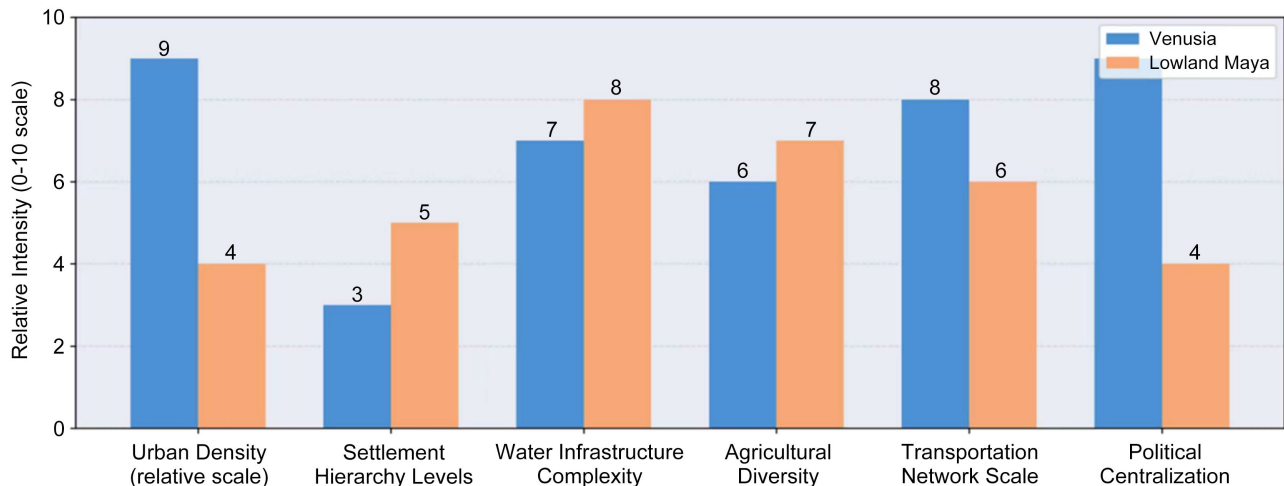


Figure 1. Comparative settlement system characteristics.

On the other hand, the Maya evolved dispersed low-density urbanism, in which the vast residential areas had large cores of ceremonies without a clear urban-rural border. These divergent features are quantified in **Figure 1** Venusia has a much higher urban density and political centralization in comparison to Maya: the latter has a much more complex settlement hierarchy, and an equal infrastructure developed with other organizational tools. The distribution of Maya settlements was a direct response to the water availability in that organic shapes were formed due to the ecological limitations and not established geometric patterns. The competition among many urban centers that were politically independent, but had to cooperate and fight in alliances, is opposite to the integration of Venusia into a single imperial structure, as it demonstrated significant differences in the political structure.

5.2. Comparison of Environmental Adaptation

There was a huge difference in the strategies of environmental adaptation depending on specific ecological settings and different social organizational abilities as shown in **Figure 2**. The adaptation of Venusia was within the Mediterranean parameters—there were predictable yearly patterns and winter was predictable with assured rainfall, whereas summer was dry. Its major problem was one of distributing water to a high location, which was addressed by aqueducts and cisterns, which were major capital investments financed by the state. Farming readjustment applied set Mediterranean mixed farming that was spread over centuriated landscape. This approach relied on a basic building block: surveying technologies, technology engineering, and management.

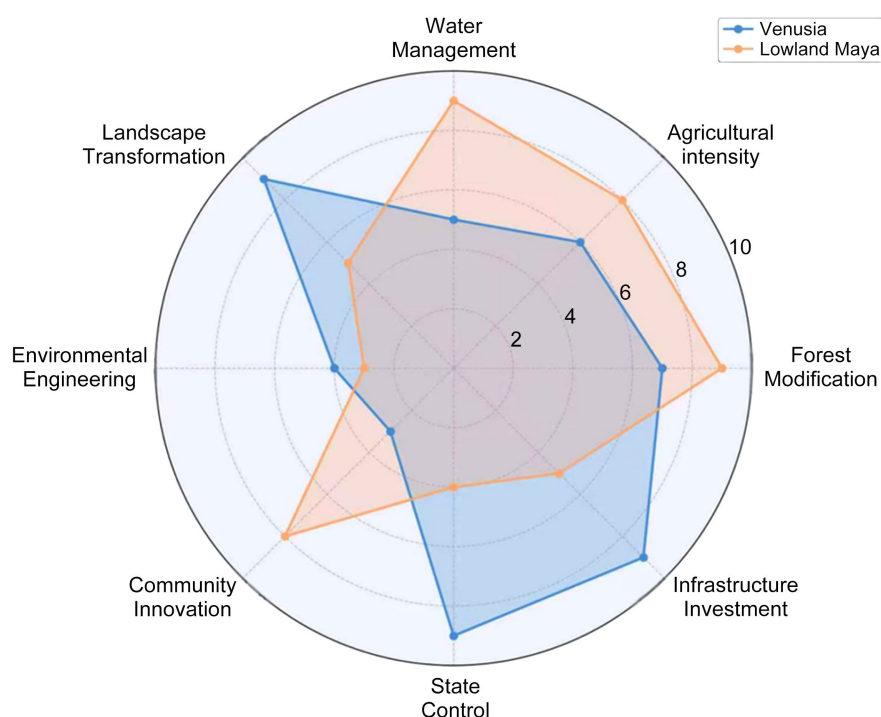


Figure 2. Environmental adaptation strategy profiles.

The Maya had to deal with more extreme limitations of dramatic seasonal water deficiency of no permanent rivers, combined with tropical heat and low karst soils. **Figure 2** depicts Maya adaptation profiles where the intensity of water management complexity and community innovation are greater whilst Venusia scores greater in the state control and infrastructure investment. Its responses to the ingenuity of Maya are impressive: large reservoir systems, agbadas plastered and integrated urban environments into water catchment systems. The idea of agriculture adaptation represented a wide range of strategies including broad swidden and narrow terracing and elevated fields with advanced environmental knowledge. Notably, this adaptation was a result of a community-based level of innovation, not a state imposed system, implying that there are two different directions: the centralized state capacity in Venusia and the decentralized technical innovations in Maya.

5.3. Interaction Models between Society and Environment

Figure 3 shows the basic variations of the models of the socio-environmental interaction. Venusia is an example of an institutional adaptation model; this is the state apparatus that mediate human-environment relationship. The Roman colonial policy established the place of settlement, city structure, the division of land, water supply, and the organization of agriculture. Environmental characteristics were considered environmental constraints in the decision-making structures that were mainly dominated by politics. There was a rapid and comprehensive transformation in the landscape which was enforced by colonial power in terms of mo-

bilizing massive resources. This top-down approach was useful in creating settlements in new lands, using the imperial engineering strength.

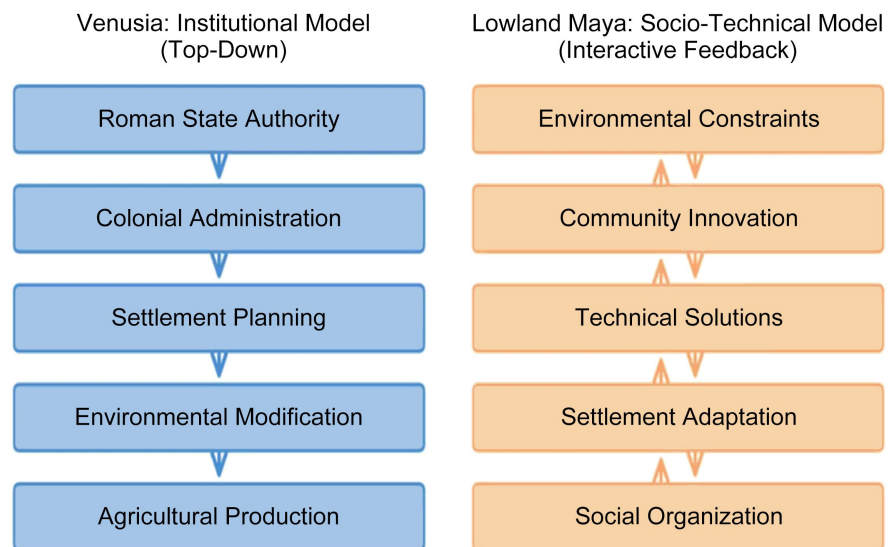


Figure 3. Socio-environmental interaction models compared.

The Maya can be outlined as a kind of a socio-technical model of adaptation which involves the relationships between communities and environment, which are reciprocal and iterative in nature. Environmental limit such as availability of water directly influenced the settlement location, as the communities settled around the water sources and generated technical solutions with the experience of local knowledge accumulated. This bidirectional arrows of **Figure 3** demonstrate this feedback relationship: climate conditions determined settlement patterns, necessitating technical advances, population concentration, new environmental strains necessitating new adjustments. This was a process which over the course of centuries was more of community trial than of formal action but with a higher capacity to adapt flexibly to environmental shifts but also susceptible to environmental disruptions as seen in the collapse of Terminal Classics with severe droughts.

5.4. Cross-Cultural Implications and Theoretical Insights

This comparative study provides substantial information used in comprehending the connections between human beings and the environment. To begin with, effective long-term settlement is possible only by radically different organizational tracks neither state directive centralization nor decentralized communities innovation is the only possible way. These dimensions are synthesized in **Figure 4** and it can be seen that despite the fact that Venusia and Maya differed greatly in the way they planned and the political formations that they were, both of them managed to reach similar long-term sustainability with the help of corresponding strategies.

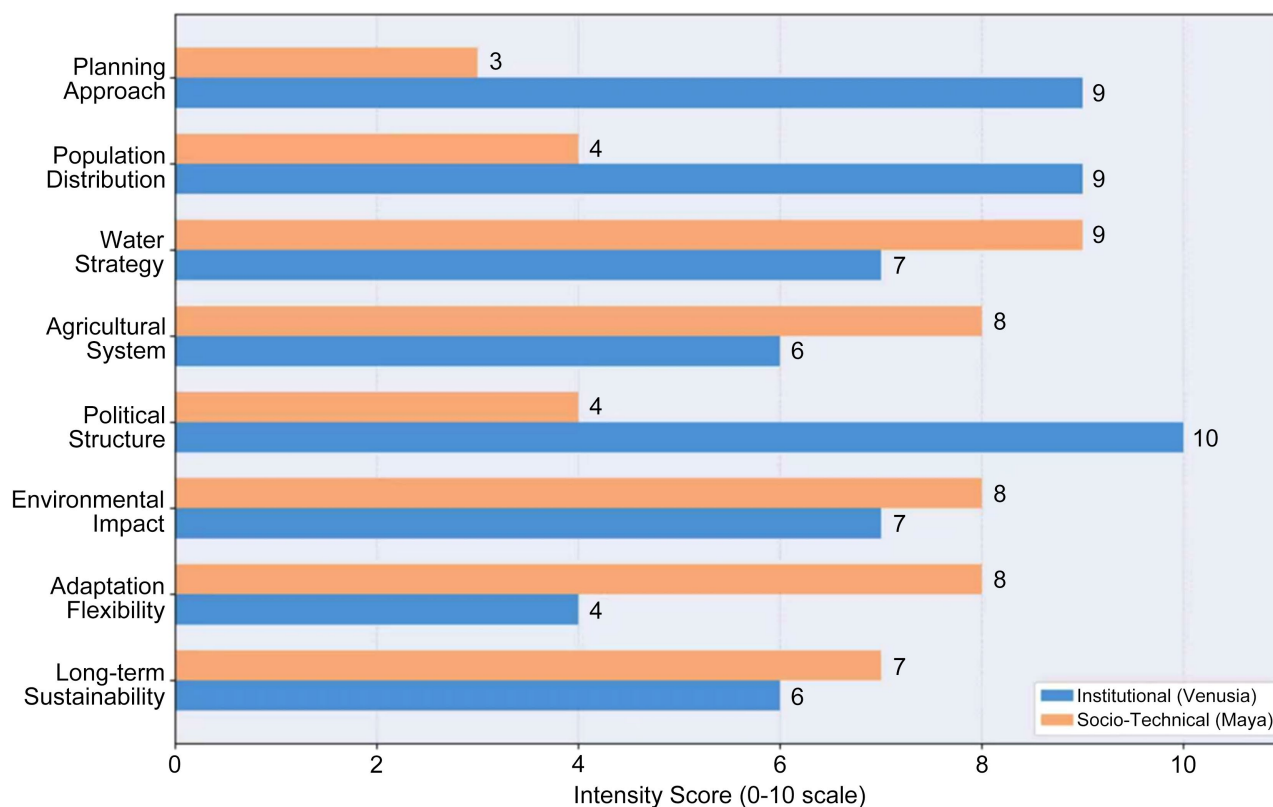


Figure 4. Settlement-environment relationship dimensions.

Second, the comparison refutes the existence of environmental determinism and accepts limitations. The water management issues in both civilizations were quite alike yet they incorporated very different solutions because of the different social organizations and technological traditions. Environment influenced, but not predetermined results-agency was at other degrees (state and community) but was central. Third, settlement form is politically economical rather than environmental adaptive. The tight orthogonal planning of Venusia represented the imperial power and administration and administrative control, whereas the Maya patterns were scattered, which indicated the limitation of water distribution as well as decentralized political competition.

Lastly, this study gives a methodological framework of comparative settlement archaeology that can be used in other cases. Through a systematic study of the settlement patterns, environmental adaptation strategies and socio-environmental interaction models, the researchers will be able to determine the general principles, but one must remember the context-specific differences. The examples of spatial technologies integration of GIS on Venusia and LiDAR on Maya show that modern analytical instruments can be used to conduct complex comparative studies. This method does not only shed light on ancient societies but also provides a contribution to the current sustainable urbanism debates, and proves the human resourcefulness in a variety of successful ways of organizing settlements and controlling ecological and social relationships within the ecological, social environ-

ment of different types.

6. Conclusion

This comparative study of Venusia and the lowland Maya shows that looking at different cultures helps us understand how societies organize space and deal with environmental challenges. By closely examining two civilizations in very different ecological and political contexts, this research fills a gap in archaeological studies and sets up a framework for broader comparisons.

The findings indicate that successful long-term settlements and large population hubs can be formed through different organizational models. Venusia exemplified a model driven by state control, using planned resource distribution and rapid landscape changes. The Roman colonial system employed surveying tools, engineering skills, and administrative frameworks to impose order on the land, leading to compact urban centers connected by standardized infrastructure. In contrast, the lowland Maya used a community-driven model marked by innovation, environmental adaptability, and scattered urban layouts. Maya communities addressed severe seasonal water shortages through advanced reservoirs, varied farming methods, and settlement patterns aligned with water sources, achieving high population densities without a centralized authority like in Rome.

These contrasting examples question simplistic views of environmental determinism while recognizing that environmental factors do shape possibilities for adaptation. Both civilizations faced significant water management issues Venusia's high location needed engineered supply systems, while the Maya's karst terrain required extensive storage solutions yet they arrived at different solutions that reflected their social structures and technological backgrounds. The environment provided both challenges and opportunities but did not dictate results. Human choices, working at various levels and through different systems, were central to the adaptation process. This observation highlights the importance of viewing human-environment relationships as interactive rather than one-sided.

The methodological benefits extend beyond these two cases. The use of spatial technologies GIS for Venusia and LiDAR for the Maya shows how modern tools can support thorough comparative studies across different times and places. A systematic approach to comparing multiple aspects provides a repeatable outline for exploring other civilizations, uncovering both common patterns in how humans organize space and unique differences shaped by local environments, political systems, and cultural practices. The visual framework from this analysis offers models for future cross-cultural studies, enhancing systematic comparative archaeology.

The practical significance of these historical insights for today's issues deserves attention. As modern societies face pressures from urban growth, resource limitations, and climate change, archaeological evidence shows that humans have found various ways to organize settlements and manage environmental relationships in different contexts. The difference between top-down control and bottom-

up community initiatives connects with ongoing discussions about sustainable development strategies. Neither method is a one-size-fits-all solution; instead, both can work under the right circumstances, suggesting that today's challenges may benefit from embracing multiple valid approaches to urban planning and environmental management.

This study is limited by differences in data resolution and coverage between GIS-based reconstructions for Venusia and LiDAR-derived models for the Maya, which affect the comparability of settlement patterns and environmental features. Environmental datasets, including hydrology, soils, and paleoclimate, provide broad regional trends but cannot fully capture localized conditions that shaped micro-level settlement decisions. Moreover, the comparison juxtaposes a Roman colonial foundation with long-developing Maya urban trajectories, meaning that political and temporal differences may influence the observed patterns. The macro-scale focus also excludes household-level or demographic modeling that could refine interpretations of adaptation strategies.

Future research could expand the comparative analysis to more civilizations, look at how settlements change over longer periods, and study how various organizational models react to environmental changes like droughts, floods, or diminishing resources. Combining paleoclimatic data with settlement archaeology will deepen our understanding of how environmental changes affect adaptive paths. Additionally, comparing settlement decline and resilience may reveal what leads to long-term sustainability versus vulnerability.

This study ultimately shows that examining settlement archaeology through systematic cross-cultural comparisons and advanced spatial technologies offers valuable insights into key questions about human social organization, environmental adaptation, and the varied ways societies have successfully navigated the complex interactions between people, places, and environments throughout history.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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