

THE COMMERCIAL STRIP. Morphology of an emergent type of street¹

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RESUMO | ABSTRACT

In the second half of the 20th century, a new mobility paradigm emerged. The individual road vehicle assumed the primary mean of moving people and goods. The time/distance relation gained a new dimension, more flexible, with wider flow ranges and options. This induced extremely fast city growth, more notorious than the one occurred during the 19th century, with the industrial revolution. Consequently, there are also profound changes in growth forms, which are no longer based on built continuity logic, but on spread, fragmented, metastatic territory. This new kind of urban fabric grows around the city main mobility axis, and through then the metropolitan continuity relations are kept.

This city development has created new urban morphologies which aren't recognized by the stabilized concepts of key urban elements of the occidental city, such as the "square" or street". The classical elements of urban fabric production gained new interpretations and arise new urban elements, which produce new urban forms.

Focusing the main attention on the linear and continuous mobility axis, which has the potential to become structural urban elements, we find that attached to it there are mono-functional buildings and partial urban fabrics, which will confer higher built densities. This new urban elements can present similar functions of the traditional streets, however at the same time they have very different morphological characteristics. So, we identify a metamorphosis/transformation process of the old regional and/or national roads that progressively become roads with an increasingly urban character.

A representative example of this process is the Commercial Strip phenomenon, an urban element which its morphogenesis arises from its primary functions, being a national road. With the

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metropolitan areas growth, it started a metamorphosis process, and become a new metropolitan structure with formal and function features similar to those in "sedimented streets".

The article presents the case of the Fernão Ferro's road, the N378, a commercial strip of the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon as a paradigmatic example of this phenomenon. The study of its morphological characteristics, its public and private spaces, through the decomposition of the various layers of components², allows a simplification of the object and a staged reading of it, allowing a better understanding of its form and mode of operation. In addition to the proposal of a key reading for these new elements the essay tries to highlight the structuring role that these new urban elements play or could play in the organization of the territory.

Thus, we try to demonstrate the ability to read and review these new urban elements through application of classical instruments of reading the morphological elements, suitably adapted to the present, in order to stabilize the process of understanding the metamorphosis of a national road to a metropolitan street, its dynamics and impact on the local metropolitan urban fabric, especially if one takes into account the fact that the urban element "street" its the most common element in the construction of public space and structural urban fabric, and is therefore extremely important to study its composition and evolution trend's.

Keywords: Urban Morphology, Urban Fragmentation, Street, Road.

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