

Suburban Forms in the Metropolitan Area of Lisboa

A morphological approach to the new urban territories

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This presentation follows a PhD research accomplished on the Faculty of Architecture UTL. It aims at morphologically studying and interpreting, in terms of models and processes, the suburban settlements and the patterns that have been characterizing the metropolitan landscape of Lisboa since the last half of the twentieth century (Cavaco, 2009).

Today the new urban territories are the empirical reference for several debates and theoretical reflections that consider the problem of the city and the urban realm in contemporaneous times. The profound transformations suffered by cities in the last decades, namely in terms of their physical form and structure (Stanilov & Scheer, 2004; Mangin, 2004), raise several questions about the appropriated disciplinary body of concepts and tools to analyze and represent them.

On one hand it is reasonable to consider that urban morphology should be the disciplinary field of election to describe these new types of urban territories since it is particularly oriented to the study of the physical form of the city (Larkham & Jones, 1980s; Allain, 2004), with an extensive and meaningful background on the analysis of the historic city and the traditional building tissues. On the other hand it is important to question the up-to-dateness (versus obsolescence) of the discipline (as well as its methods and conceptual tools) (Merlin & Choay, 1981), when the emerging attributes of the new urban territories, often characterized as fragmented, discontinuous, unclear and amorphous, require specific and more accurate insights.

Focused on this debate, the research intended to reason about the methodology of approach to apply to the new urban territories taking into account the disciplinary basis of urban morphology.

Under the hypothesis that suburban territories are not as chaotic (without order nor structure, without rule nor model) as we usually consider them, the argument for the research is that the *rule* and the *model*, as two primary proceeding figures of the conception and the production of the building space (Choay, 1980; Cavaco, 2006), can constitute an important morphological tool to recognize both the *legibility* and the *intelligibility of contemporary urban form and structure*. They can also be a reference in the construction of a preliminary basis to support the creation and the transformation of urban space in contemporaneity.

Thus, the research came to define a reading framework or a model of analysis to support the morphological study and the interpretation of the suburban forms in the AML. Through the identification of four fundamental traits or principles – the elemental approach, the temporal foundation, the procedural perspective and the resolution openness – which refer to the different demarches of urban morphology (according to the three main schools of urban morphology, the Italian school, the French school and the British school), the reading framework is structured into different levels, scales, times and degrees of approach.

In order to achieve the argument of the research, two different levels of approach - an elemental and a procedural approach - are then established and conciliated. At an elemental level, in the optics of the legibility of the building tissues, elements and urban materials are identified, read and analyzed considering the different forms of aggregation and combination between them (Viganò, 1999). At a procedural level, with an eye to the intelligibility of the urban territories, the reasons and the processes structurally decisive to construct the rationality of the urban form are scrutinized and synthesized according to the figures of the rule and the model.

Indeed, the avalanche of dynamics, logics, processes and actors that emerge and invade the urban realm, the multiplication and pulverization of ideas, aspirations and wills that qualified the contemporary society and the city in general, give the platform of intelligibility – i.e., the intelligible structure of urban form – an important role and a strengthened emphasis when the aim is to read, understand and design the contemporary city.

Three other fundamentals enlighten both the elemental and the procedural insights: time, in the simultaneity of a synchronic and a diachronic reading; scale or granulometry of resolution, considering multi-scale approaches; and abstraction degree, since the model of analysis is able to recognize both the sensible parameters of urban form, related with its perceptive attributes, and the

abstract aspects of the problem such as the economical conditions, the legal and administrative proceedings, or the political context.

Upon the identification of case studies in the territorial context of the suburbanization forms in the AML, this presentation aims at debating the methodological questions that are associated to a morphological approach to the new urban territories.

Key words: Urban form, Suburbia, Suburbanization, New Urban Territories, Metropolitan Area of Lisboa

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