

## **Structures and Textures of the Contemporary City: a methodological propose for analyzing the expanded city**

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The urban form of the contemporary city is a fundamental issue of our time.

First of all, because 'city' or 'urban form' do not correspond to a universal and timeless generic reality. Urbanization, among other meanings, is a multiform and multi-scale expression, reacting to contexts between global hiper-massification and localisms.

The inability to share a single idea about the city, the loss of confidence in the benchmarks, carries an absence of self-esteem for what is not known and simultaneously exposes the gap between the real physical space and its perception and representation.

Currently, we are not facing a dichotomy between city and urban, or two opposite types of urban, or two city conditions. What happens actually, is that we are facing a new emerging entity that encourages a proliferation of discourse and rhetoric, either rejecting or accepting it.

Even for those who recognize and accept the paradigm shift and the complexity of the new urban order became evident that "*one can not close Pandora's box and imagine a simpler configuration of the world*" (Innerarity, 2001, p. 231).

The materials of extensive urbanization and polarization, the territorial patterns and the urban forms of recent origin have not been subjected to studies that establish a new "*taxonomic arsenal*" (Solà-Morales, 1997, p. 25) and that go beyond the traditional micro-scale reading of consolidated tissues and corresponding open spaces.

Existing studies about the urban form have focused on analysis at the macro-scale, dealing mostly on the dynamics of growth and on the configuration of the spatial structure of urban regions, i.e., characterizing the geographical dimension of edification and polarization phenomena and identifying the relations system established between the most representative territorial situations.

Mangin (2004, p. 21) designates as a "*curious absence*" this "*deficit of morphological contributions and cartographic demonstrations*" with respect to the 'new cities'. He explains this fact with the domain of private enterprise in building of new territorialities (multiple logics, therefore, superimposed on different modes of regulation and not on a 'plan'); with the lack of adequate cartographic material, including the cadastre (whether the micro or the macro-scale); with a certain

rejection to the study of the 'ordinary city' and with the speed of change imposed by velocity and by the acceleration of the technologies. In view of the static representation of the canonical city there counteract the effects of the torrential regime of production of urbanized territory.

To accept the complexity of contemporary urbanization, in its various components and circumstances, and, above all, understand it requires a reading that exceeds the current level of abstraction and simplicity with which one describes these territories, which is increasingly more distinct from its actual reality.

A strict reading of cartography and its graphic conventions, as it is normally produced, does not allow the comprehension of the distinctive features of the various territorialities. Thus the reading of the territory tends to consider many of the low density areas outside of urban nucleus as a uniform and uninteresting succession merely crossed by mobility channels that do not introduce diverse morphological materials - spaces without qualities.

To reflect on the morphological dimension of the territory requires overcoming a logic of interpretation of growth measured exclusively in functional terms and requires recognizing its genetic code, its formal structure, its physical image and its historical construction (Sabaté, 2002, p. 19).

The analysis of contemporary territory requires, necessarily, an effort of interpretation, understanding and systematization of urban complexity, demanding to the observation the selection of the dimensions to describe and the previous definition of the problem which one intends to explain. The inventory of relevant urban entities, integrating its various aspects, should consider as a fundamental theoretical assumption that the starting point to the comprehension is the description of existing reality and, therefore, the identification of the intelligible components.

Our purpose is therefore to make legible and highlight the specific themes of the contemporary constructed reality in its various scales. The reading implies knowing the *Structures* as well as the *Textures* of the territory, the built elements and the free space, the pictorial and symbolic imagery that it entails.

The use of the concepts *Structure* and *Texture* represents, in fact, the use of a narrative device that allows us to describe the contemporary city in its various scales and contexts. The assumptions that enclose act systematically by overlap revealing the instability which features the method proposed for the analysis and, simultaneously, its added value as a mechanism that enables to translate, in a realistic way, the existing complexity (its multiple scales, variations and combinations).

Indeed, it seems essential, to overcome the limitations imposed by conventional taxonomic frameworks, to proceed with a reading methodology that assumes in its own construction the hyper-textual dimension of the new urban geographies of hypermodern society (Ascher, 2005).

Key-words: Contemporary City, Morphology, Structure, Texture

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