

PROCEEDINGS OF THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
PRESERVATION AND IMPROVEMENT
OF HISTORIC TOWNS

SREMSKI KARLOVCI
12TH – 13TH MAY 2016

ТРЕЋА МЕЂУНАРОДНА КОНФЕРЕНЦИЈА
ОЧУВАЊЕ И УНАПРЕЂЕЊЕ
ИСТОРИЈСКИХ ГРАДОВА

СРЕМСКИ КАРЛОВЦИ
12–13. МАЈ 2016. ГОДИНЕ



Publishers
Provincial Institute for the Protection of Culutral Monuments,
Petrovaradin
Municipality of Sremski Karlovci

Издавачи
Покрајински завод за заштиту споменика Културе,
Петроварадин
Општина Сремски Карловци

For the publisher
Zoran Vapa
Provincial Institute for the Protection of Culutral Monuments,
Petrovaradin
Nenad Milenković
Municipality of Sremski Karlovci

За издавача
Зоран Вапа
Покрајински завод за заштиту споменика Културе,
Петроварадин
Ненад Миленковић
Општина Сремски Карловци

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Editing and proof reading
Serbian language: Slobodanka Dačić
English language: Jelena Popović

Лектор и коректор
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за енглески језик: Јелена Поповић

Technical editor
Lazo Satmari

Технички уредник
Лазо Сатмари

Circulation
300

Тираж
300

Printed by
JP Službeni glasnik, Belgrade, 2017

Штампа
ЈП Службени гласник, Београд, 2017

ISBN 978-86-80929-36-1

ИСБН 978-86-80929-36-1

The publication of the monograph was supported by the Provincial
Secretary for Culture and Public Information of the AP Vojvodina

Издавање зборника помогао је Покрајински секретаријат
за културу и јавно информисање АП Војводине.

CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији
Библиотека Матице српске, Нови Сад

711.523.025(082)

**INTERNATIONAL Conference Preservation and Improvement of Historic Towns
(3 ; 2016 ; Sremski Karlovci)**

Proceedings of the Third International Conference Preservation and Improvement of Historic Towns, Sremski Karlovci 12th-13th May, 2016 = [Зборник радова са] Треће међународне конференције Очување и унапређење историјских градова, Сремски Карловци, 12-13. мај 2016. године / [editor Dubravka Đukanović]. - Petrovaradin : Provincial Institute for the Protection of Culutral Monuments ; Sremski Karlovci : Municipality, 2017 (Belgrade : Službeni glasnik). - 641 str. : ilustr. ; 24 cm

Radovi na engl. i srp. jeziku. - Tiraž 300. - Стр. 8-11: Предговор / Зоран Вапа = Foreword / Zoran Vapa. - Bibliografija uz svaki rad. - Rezimeji na srp. ili engl. jeziku uz većinu radova.

ISBN 978-86-80929-36-1

а) Градови - Историјски центри - Зборници
COBISS.SR-ID 313765895

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MORPHOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE HISTORICAL TOWN: THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CITY-BUILDING

INTRODUCTION: RELATING URBAN CONSERVATION TO URBAN PLANNING AND URBAN MORPHOLOGY

Contemporary approaches to urban conservation indicate the need to extend the scope of protection of individual architectural monuments and historic buildings to wider spatial entities – primarily to the historic town, and then to cultural and historic landscapes [1]. These contemporary approaches require establishing active relationships between urban conservation and urban planning that would enable historic towns to develop in accordance with contemporary life conditions. These relationships should be especially established with regards to the need to simultaneously observe various levels of space; reading and interpreting the existing spatial values. This implies the necessity of interdisciplinary cooperation and the establishment of a balanced, integrative and sustainable process of space management [1].

It is exactly this updating of urban conservation approaches which necessitates connecting with urban planning and in turn calls upon urban morphology as an adequate and comprehensive theoretical framework. *Understanding place* – its character, identity and importance – has been put forward as a central concern of urban morphological investigations – and also as the basis for the formulation of principles and guidelines for the practice of further planning and space management [2]. However, firstly, it is important to explain what *understanding place* means and which methods achieve results in this respect.

One of the problems in urban morphology is that investigations of the historic town and attitudes towards urban history and cultural heritage do not go further than mere dating and descriptions [2] [3]. Insufficient awareness of a town as a mosaic of urban

forms has been noted as a widespread problem, where crucial importance has been assigned to understanding how these forms overlap and fit into each other [4].

Urban morphologists use various approaches in order to analyze and explain the complexity of spatial phenomena. They can be classified as spatial-analytical, configurational, process-typological, historico-geographical, all of them observing various aspects of the built environment – spatial relations of physical entities, relations between processes and physical structure, urban changes and flows. The results of various approaches and investigations of various aspects of space have one common reference and that is urban form as a complex phenomenon [5].

Morphological investigations can be used as an analytical tool – for analyzing the existing state; as a regulative tool – to proscribe rules and regulations of future development; or as a creative tool to examine possibilities of a site and generate spatial solutions [6]. The combination of these methods in urban planning procedures leads to moving from descriptions of the historic town to prescriptions for its future development.

THE HISTORIC TOWN IN URBAN MORPHOLOGY

The historic town in urban morphology represents a complex urban form and a paradigmatic model of city-building [7]. Firstly, in the period of the earliest urban morphological investigations, which overlaps with the time of emerging of Sitte's theory about town building as well as urban planning as a discipline, it served as the backbone of the comparative analysis of spontaneously developed and planned towns [8]. The second important period are the 1960s, the period of criticism of modernist practice in urban planning and designing, when the historic town became an analogical model for improving built environment by restoring character, identity, meaning and human scale as recognized in the model of the historic town [9]. This is also the period when urban design as a discipline emerged, connecting levels of designing and planning through qualities of the built environment. This was closely related to the emergence of contemporary discourse of urban morphology which aimed at the consolidation of knowledge of the urban form, and its introduction to urban planning. In most recent urban theories, the historic town together with its compact form has become the paradigm of sustainability [10].

In urban morphology, the form of the historic town as a paradigmatic model of city-building is related to the Middle Ages [6]¹ which is consistent with notions of the

.....
1 For more references see [6], p.38.

traditional town in urban conservation [1]. The reason for this is probably the fact that it was the Middle Ages when the traditional town was able to be recognized as a complete, rounded, clear and legible urban form. Due to the fact that the town boundary constrained the spread of its territory, transformations within the boundary occurred according to the principle of systemic balance [11].

Urban morphological analysis of medieval Alnwick in England conducted by German geographer Conzen has become one of the classics of urban morphological analysis of historic settlements. It made a tremendous contribution to *understanding place* at Alnwick, through developing the methodology for the analyzing the town plan and developmental processes within the town boundary [12].

The town plan of Alnwick was analyzed at different urban levels right down to individual plots and buildings, using maps to show how the town plan developed, how it changed and how the relationships between different components of the plan were established. According to this analysis, the main parts of the plan were: the town plan or ground plan (including locations, streets, plots and blocks), the building fabric (its 3D form), land and building utilization. The main attributes of a complex urban form were the resistance to change, followed by historico-morphological characteristics; and, lastly, the contribution to the hierarchy of units [4].

In addition, Conzen developed a precise terminology which makes an important part of the contemporary glossary of urban morphology available through the International Seminar of Urban form [13].

Morphological Framework stands for the most comprehensive concept derived from Alnwick's town plan analysis. It describes the empirical reality of the traditional town. It reflects historical expressiveness – understanding of the townscape as a visual experience and as such a source of knowledge of social activities and processes. Urban form has been defined as a composition of complex elements such as the street system, the plot pattern and the building pattern. Special importance of the Morphological Frame concept lies in its four-dimensionality – it possesses a spatial as well as a time dimension [14]. On the one hand, it represents the configuration/mosaic of lower-scale urban forms – so called 'morphological regions' – defined as the spatial areas with a homogeneous urban structure [13]. However, it also represents the cumulative effect of various 'morphological periods' – defined as cultural periods that exert a distinctive influence upon the whole town or any of its parts [13]. Through the analysis of the town's urban form at all levels and over time, 'morphological priorities' can be identified – constant, durable elements and values with the highest resistance

to change [13]. They act as points of connection for various morphological periods over time and in that way support the idea of continuity in town development.

RECENT URBAN MORPHOLOGICAL STUDIES ON THE CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORICAL AREAS

There are several examples of recent studies on the contemporary development of historic areas based on Conzen's morphological tradition. One of them is Karl Kropf's *District Design Guide* for Stratford-on-Avon, from 2001. The main principles in developing historic areas are connecting various levels of space, identifying specific characteristics that contribute to character and identity and then connecting character and sustainability by using the existing state as the source of spatial information and impetus for innovation. The result is a range of documents that introduce the design as a planning component [15].

Studio REAL identifies twenty-two attributes of urban form that inform planning, and provides the 'rules of community' which operate at one of the following levels: patterns of settlements, neighbourhood units, relationships between streets and plots, architectural design. The rules of regulating streets, defining maximum heights and position of entrances in buildings are some of the key points in designing and planning at the level of plots [16].

Chelmsford's case is indicative because it is an example of how a town has raised its vitality and attractiveness due to the planning politics stemming from recognizing the specific context and designing guidelines based on high standards of urban design. It is an example of an urban settlement where most of its built structure was not under cultural protection but its urban form was still recognized as a valuable entity to support continued development of the existing values [17].

In the case of Serbia – if we analyze contemporary planning documents, we can conclude that a more cohesive relationship between the promoted goals of character preservation and the identity of urban areas, and the plan elements and guidelines which directly influence the built environment are required [18]. For example, in the case of the Master Plan of Belgrade 2021, we can see that it defines urban areas, buildings and conditions that cannot be subject to changes – defined as fixed elements and permanent values of the city. However, this part of the plan has a descriptive character, and given recommendations are not obligatory. The protected areas are displayed in the graphic part entitled 'Permanent Goods' – not in the main body of

the plan but within the documentation basis, and are not linked with the division to urban entities, for which specific building rules are defined.

There are also valuable parallel studies conducted on historic parts of cities which should be but so far have not been taken into account when planning due to their non-obligatory legal status. They express more concern about the effects of building and show potential for integrating the morphological approach into practice. Namely, negative effects of globalization on its traditional morphology and building typology have been noticed. Besides buildings that are considered cultural goods, attention has been called upon vernacular architecture which contributes to positive ambiental values of the city space [19]. For example, in the study on Kosančićev Venac, one of the oldest parts of Belgrade's city centre, which is covered by high-level cultural protection, an approach based on recognizing the problems has been proposed. That subsumes reevaluation of all existing physical structures according to the criteria of promoted goals [20].

CONCLUSIONS

The traditional town in urban morphology stands as a paradigmatic urban form, as well as a repertoire of concepts for contemporary planning and designing. By conducting an urban morphological analysis, we can identify relationships between existing urban forms and developmental processes. Taking into account these relationships, in formulating the plan guidelines contribution, it is possible to preserve the character and identity of traditional towns in the context of contemporary life. Urban morphology underlines the need for a critical attitude towards history where historical precedent is not an absolute model to follow, but a source of information. An active relationship between urban conservation and urban designing and planning is required where urban morphology can pave the way for making a common scientific and professional platform.

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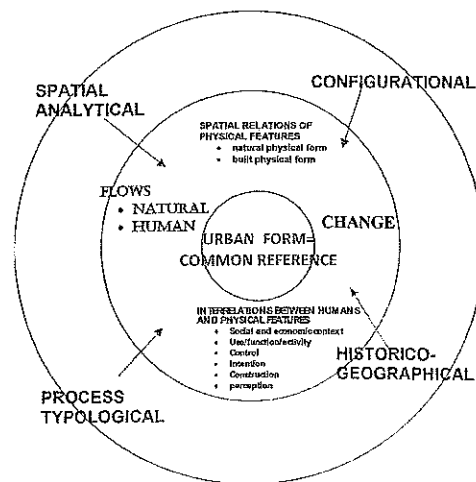
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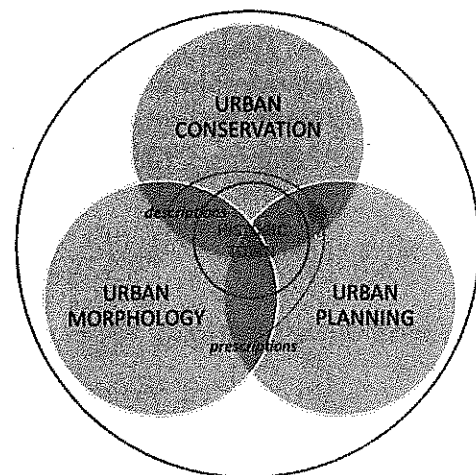
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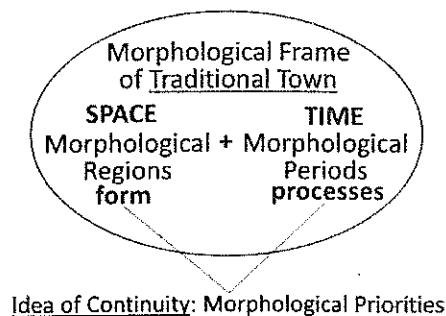
Picture 1. Approaches and aspects in urban morphology and urban form as its common reference.



Picture 2. of applying urban morphology theory in the practice of architectural and urban designing and planning of historical towns



Picture 3. Interpretation of the urban conservation's idea of continuity through the urbomorphological concepts.



МОРФОЛОШКИ ОКВИР ИСТОРИЈСКОГ ГРАДА: ТЕОРИЈА И ПРАКСА ГРАЂЕЊА ГРАДОВА

Сажетак: Сложена урбана форма историјској или традиционалној града представља једну од централних израживачких тема урбане морфологије, као важан извор информација о развојним процесима у граду и просторним моделима који резултирају из њих. „Морфолошки оквир“ представља један од кључних концепата у урбаној морфологији који описује емпиријску реалност традиционалној града и помаже разумевању међузависности између урбаних процеса и урбаних форми. Додатно, он представља шири и обухватнији теоријски оквир у који се могу илацирати остали релевантни концепти и дефиниције, а што помаже консолидацији знања о традиционалном граду и његовој урбаној форми. У раду се указује на могућности примене урбане морфологије у пракси архитектонско-урбанистичкој пројектовања и планирања историјских градова. Истичу се елементи који повезују савремене приступе урбаној конзервацији са урбаним планирањем и урбаном морфологијом. Такође се наводе примери урбоморфолошких студија за историјска подручја с посебним напласком на њихову применљивост у нашој средини. Путем коришћења урбоморфолошкој приступу при студији урбане форме традиционалној града могуће је преосишати јаз између конзерваторских инструка и аналитичко-дескриптивних студија простора, с једне стране и праксе планирања и управљања простором, с друге. У том смислу, сазнања урбане морфологије могу бити значајан ослонац на путу ка усклађивању урбане конзервације и урбаног планирања у савременом развоју историјских градова.

Кључне речи: историјски/традиционални град, „морфолошки оквир“, урбана морфологија, савремени приступи урбаној конзервацији, архитектонско-урбанистичко пројектовање и планирање.