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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Abstract

According to the basic theorem of Prof. Zoltán Szentkirályi, the interpretation of the history of architecture should be extended to the history of organizing space. As linear space in architecture is the way subsequent space-elements develop for us in time, it may be related with the urban space composed of streets and squares. Figure-ground analysis proved to be a useful tool to describe the dichotomy of mass and space. The historical categories of Prof. Szentkirályi: the topological, the eschatological, the intellectual and the rational may be connected with the categories of Kevin Lynch: the city of faith (i.e. medieval cities), the city of the engine (i.e. the industrial city) and the polycentric city of our age. It may be related with the space-theoretical concepts of Christian Norberg-Schulz: the centre and the place, the direction and the way and the network city correspondingly. As a morphological analogy, we may speak about central, linear and even or dispersed distribution of buildings. Finally, the study introduces five qualitative categories to describe spiritual orientations of contemporary urban design: the chaotic, the organic, the rational, the emotional and the symbolic. The combination of these categories may provide a complex system of evaluation.

Keywords

architecture · urban design · history of architecture · space theory · planning theory

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In spite of the continuity between the architectural and urban scale, the basic difference seems to be that architecture is interested in interior space, while urbanism is committed to exterior or outdoor space, which is the world of streets and squares that mainly represents the public realm. However, it is evident from the point of space theory that we can perceive space only through its formal opposite: by masses or enclosing walls. That is why Szentkirályi defines interior space as *antinomic-mass*, and building mass as *antinomic-space* – expressing that *formed and organized space* has always been a closed and solid entity otherwise typical only for masses: the German term is *Raumkörper*. Relating to mass oriented exterior space, he underlines that “mass is dissolved in space as if it were flowing in and around interwoven with continuous and mild transitions and with a rich play of positive and negative forms”. [9, p.434] For Szentkirályi, mass does not appear as an independent entity in our senses, but more as a kind of *space-filling form*. In other words, in architecture *we organize the space around us*, while in the case of exterior space *we are standing in it* as other objects do. Similarly, Szentkirályi interprets the role of time: “time is defined always in relation to space for perception, and becomes experienced only through the mediation of its formal opposite, that is of space”. [9, p.437] He explains that while the role of time is restricted in a mass-oriented space-attitude, in a time-oriented attitude “space is broken down into sections, “distances”, and this way their symbolic role increases”. He calls the former *topographical*, and the latter *eschatological* attitude. When speaking of exterior space in the realm of streets and squares, it is obvious that the role of time is of decisive importance, as the continuity of streets are practically broken up into measurable sections. We could almost say that urban squares correspond to the topographical, and the streets to the eschatological space form - independent of the fact that Szentkirályi relates the latter mainly to sacral or intellectual contents. At the same time, it is remarkable that by topographical he denotes three different spatial situations: 1. the freestanding mass (as “antinomic” space), 2. its negative, the circularly organized interior space (as “antinomic” mass), and 3. the space

densely furnished by mass-elements, where the limits of the space are hardly perceived (as for instance in the columned hall of ancient Karnak). [9, p.280] When we remove the roof of an interior area, a *court* is created, representing a well-known type of closed exterior space, while the undifferentiated open space among freestanding buildings represents a kind of *flowing* or *intermediate* space typical in housing estates. Conversely, mass not only has a space-filling, but a space-enclosing and a space-generating function, while the architectural role of the wall increases, and may even become independent from the mass.

In the end, we may say that in removing any enclosing wall of an interior space, or changing the measure of its transparency, the difference between interior and exterior space disappears. We are better to speak about the *continuity* of openness in general with infinite transitions and variations of different kinds. Architectural and urban space cannot be contrasted with one another, on the contrary, it is about the same phenomenon with the hermetically closed interior space at one end, and the completely open exterior space at the other. Even a two dimensional ground surface may embody the attributes of space by a change in texture, the undulations of the topography, bushes, trees or marking devices of any kind playing the role of enclosing space. We can involve even landscape architecture into the realm of space theory: clearings and tracks represent “natural” spaces, and the forest itself clearly reminds us of the flowing or intermediate space of the densely columned halls of antiquity or the open space between the slabs of any housing estate.

According to one of the most important statements of Szentkirályi, the essence of architecture is not so much the formation, but more the *organization of space*. We can say that it is similarly true in an urban context with the difference that the *organization of the masses*, that is the distribution patterns, may play an important role. Szentkirályi underlines that in definite historical eras space used to be comprehended rather as a sum of movement-phases. Linearly organized space is just “the way *ongoing space-phases develop for us*”. He demonstrates this phenomenon in classical architectural complexes, but it can be evidently applied to exterior spaces, namely to streets. As the spatial realm of cities is composed mainly by narrower and longer space-bands of this kind, it is important to classify it. Bollnow uses the Greek word *hodos* = *way* to form the new term *hodological space*. [2] In cities, we have to break with the static way of looking at things from a single viewpoint, and we have to accept that space can be experienced only in motion. This means that hodological space is a kind of *flowing space*, and its description cannot be confined to snapshots. Both the *principle of addition* and that of *conjunction* in Szentkirályi’s perspective is realized in the sequential continuity of space elements. Frigyes Pogány represented this approach by analysing historical ensembles in his famous books [8], and this recognition led Gordon Cullen in 60s England and the landscape architect Lucius Burckhardt in Kassel in the 80s to establish the school

of linear sight analysis, the German *Spaziergangswissenschaft* or *promenadology* in English. While Szentkirályi’s interest is focused on space-organizing patterns in architecture, the *experience of continuity* results in the linear sight-analysis of urban landscapes. As an outcome of this shift of interest, beside the topography and the morphology of the space, the natural environment, the undulations of the terrain, the spirit of the place, the culture and the social life, even the walking subject belongs to the scene.

In order to broaden space theory into the urban realm, it is easy to find an analogous link between the solid/empty or figure/ground dichotomy of Gestalt psychology and the dichotomy of mass and space. This may lead to a simple typology of morphological situations, where mass and space can be mutually considered as each other’s figure and ground respectively. This results in the following four basic categories [5, pp. 28-29]:

	FIGURE	GROUND	
1	mass	space	mass in space (space around freestanding building)
2	space	mass	space in mass (courtyard sapace)
3	space	space	space in space (fenced space)
4	mass	mass	mass in mass (composit building mass)

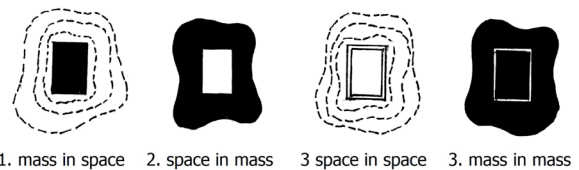


Fig. 1.

Typological research is interested in concrete varieties and the diversity of the basic categories on one hand, and the phenomenon of *transient spaces* [1] representing the connection and the transition between neighbouring spaces of a different kind on the other. At the same time, it is necessary to go beyond the scope of Szentkirályi’s attention to the descriptive analysis of historical architecture, and to extend our interest to a space theory suitable for analysing and evaluating the urban fabric of any kind, including contemporary urban developments.

The most interesting and debated part of Szentkirályi’s space theory is the *treatise about the historical categories of architecture* [9, pp. 271-343]. It is easy to understand the disapproval of contemporary critics committed to Marxist aesthetics: the notorious categories of *topographical*, *eschatological*, *intellectual* and *rational*. It was difficult to deny its spiritual orientation, considered as an ideological taboo, at that time. Whereas it is obvious that these categories paired with one another may well be applied to the description of typical space-organizing patterns in different historical eras. It is a challenge to work

out a typology of exterior spaces and the distribution patterns of buildings as an analogue to Szentkirályi's concept. Space and mass are complementary phenomena that even in an urban context determine each other. The contribution of Kevin Lynch and Norberg-Schulz to space theory was of decisive importance. Their point of departure was a trinity of historical categorisation. Kevin Lynch speaks about *the city of faith* (mainly medieval cities), *the city of the engines* (in the age of the industrial revolution) and the *organic city* of the present and of the future – the latter expression reflecting more an optimistic, later disappointed expectation based on suburban development and the dispersed expansion patterns of cities in a polycentric network [4]. Norberg-Schulz reinterpreted these categories more according to their space-organizing tendencies [7]. In the first period, *the role of the centre* and *the place* were of decisive importance. The second period is characterised by the increasing role of transport and movement: *the directions* and *the (new) ways* were transforming the cities. Today, the *economy of (changing) land use* is determining the structure and the future of our cities. It is easy to discover the categories of Szentkirályi in them: the eschatological, the intellectual and the rational. The topographical attitude does not appear as an independent principle because organizing space in an urban scale is realized always in topographical dimensions. Parallel to the categories of Norberg-Schulz we may speak of *central*, *linear* and *space-filling* organization models. The first two represent a kind of directed spatial distribution of elements in the urban fabric, whereas the last is *without direction*, realized in an *even* distribution and always filling the territory at its disposal. There are many similar interpretations, of which, that of Cedric Price is worth mentioning because of its spirited analogy [6, pp.31-32]. He compares the city of the Middle Ages to a cooked egg (because of the hard shell as city-wall and its dense core), the city of the industrial revolution to the soft egg (because of the “urban fringe” and the early dispersal of the urban population), and the “organic” city of our age to the scrambled egg (because its filling or overflowing the pan, resembling the scattered patterns of regional urban development). Each of the models underlines that these categories are not at all exclusive or restricted in time, but almost all present in each era but with the predominance of one – similarly to the historical categories of Szentkirályi, who adds, that for instance, in our days all are present at the same time. Therefore, the pairing or the trinity of the categories is similarly possible.

We will remain in Szentkirályi's debt for the relating of his deep historical intellectualism. It is apparent that his categories of topographical, eschatological, intellectual and rational give a deeper insight into the worldview of different eras compared to the geometrical distribution patterns of urban structures. Parallel to Szentkirályi's categories, we have tried to introduce intellectual or spiritual tendencies as possible tools for describing and evaluating today's urban design proposals as a kind of

holistic approach. These tendencies are the *chaotic*, the *organic*, the *emotional*, the *rational* and the *symbolic* [5, pp.293-297].

Chaotic orientation is the lack of any spiritual principle. There is no direction or regulation of any kind in the spatial distribution of the elements. Random dispersal of huts represents the provisional pattern of nomadic life in history, reflecting an unstable primeval state being at the same time the source of later potential diversity and richness. That is why contemporary architecture and urban design show particular preference to chaotic patterns, applies oblique and avoids the orthogonal, mixes different time-layers on one-another, creates collage and collision and tries to be “naturally unsophisticated”. It rejects systems of any kind, declines toward the archaic, and represents a special attitude and aesthetic preference of our day.

The *organic* orientation as spiritual principle is seemingly the opposite of the chaotic, but it is more a simulation of increasing complexity in evolution. The organic retains but surpasses the chaotic at the same time as its dialectic counterpart. It represents a higher level of integration as the whole is more than the mere sum of its parts. While the chaotic is essentially an unstable condition, the organic succeeds in realizing a more dynamic form of equilibrium. The chaotic may have a structure, but the organic has to have an organism. It is not a formalistic principle; rather it manifests itself as a generating principle and formative system in urban design.

The *rational* orientation is the polar counterpart of the organic, but not inevitably its opposite. Rationality is a direct reference to the principle of functionalism. Reality and problems exist only so far as you can identify, understand, measure, and consequently change them. In urban planning, it is the principle of order, the separation of functions and of the mechanical repetition of elements. However, rationality may be capable of surpassing itself. By widening its scope, it may open up towards other spiritual tendencies and may as easily support intellectual ambitions as a “scientific” approach, to ideological or to philosophical preferences.

The *emotional* orientation is more a kind of intellectual opposition to rationalism and functionalism by giving preference to the personal, to intuition and to emotions. It may be expressive, but it is mostly committed to historical traditions, to affections for the place, to the country and to the native cultural heritage. That is why its central concept is *identity*, traditionalism and regionalism. Another form of its manifestation is an *aesthetical attitude* in design and evaluation. Aesthetic mentality represents a new form of consciousness and of cognition as a counterpart of rationalism. It comes on stage only after the age of the Renaissance and is deeply conditioned by historical memory and patterns.

The core of the *symbolical* orientation is a political, ideological and/or religious commitment. Originally, it represented the sacral world order in a profane environment. It is sometimes a critical or a revolutionary attitude with a programme

of improving the existing situation in the name of an ideology or of a utopian vision. Geometry is preferred, but not because of its rational, more for its symbolic meaning. As it represents a very high level of intellectualism, it runs the risk of conflicting with real world processes. It turns easily into a spectacular expression of political power.

With regards to qualitative categories, it is worthwhile mentioning different theoretical or literary approaches in relation to the *identity of the place*. It seems important that which Béla Hamvas wrote about different atmospheres prevailing in the regions of the Carpathian basin in his “Five Genii” [3]. He stresses that the “genius” of the mountainous North rich in cool forests, the endless plains of the East, the cheerful and sunny Mediterranean of the South, the civilized West and the spirit of Transylvania represent not only geographical regions, but also different mentalities of the people living there revealed in their culture and cities. These genii are present in each region but in different proportions. It is noteworthy that these regions

with their manifold identities have been able to integrate people and their cultures coming and settling from different parts of Europe. That is why Béla Hamvas speaks about *sacral geography*. There is a large volume of published studies describing the dimensions of identity in different professional fields waiting to be evaluated and integrated as interrelating approaches.

The qualities explained above may be paired or combined with one other. Besides one or two prevailing dimensions, all may be present in a given place or in an urban complex, complimenting each other, but in very different proportions. Urban studies cannot be restricted to outstanding historical ensembles. If we would like to avoid alienating traditional evaluation systems from present urban design situations, we ought to introduce common interpretation concepts in order to facilitate a comparative discourse. Simply put, the heritage of Zoltán Szentkirályi should be lifted from oblivion and disinterest, since it is capable of playing an important part in the native and international development of urban space theory.

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