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A review on Urban Morphology Schools

Dr. MohammadReza PourMohammadi; *Professor of Geography and Urban Planning; Tabriz University*

Dr. Mir Sattar Sadr Mousavi; *Associate Professor of Geography and Urban Planning; Tabriz University*

Siroos Jamali*; *Ph.D. Student in Geography and Urban Planning; Tabriz University*

Extended Abstract

1- Introduction

Urban morphology started to take place as an organized field of knowledge at the end of the nineteenth century (Whitehand,2007:1). Regarding the variety of forces that shape cities, it is natural to accept this field of knowledge as an interdisciplinary field. Urban morphology is briefly defined as:

- ✎ The study of the form of cities over the time (Scheer, 2002: 106).*
- ✎ The field that studies the process of city building and its products (Moudon, 1998: 141).*
- ✎ The study of the physical (or built) fabric of urban form, and the people and processes shaping it (Jones and Larkham, 1991:55).*

Focusing on the positive reevaluation of the urban fabric through different routes, three schools in Europe began to elaborate theories for the understanding of built environment and the relation between its elements. These schools are briefly discussed below.

2- Methodology

This descriptive-comparative research paper is based on documentary studies of the authors taking into account the more comparative studies dealing with the most important and recent accounts of researches in this regard.

3- Discussion

The three main schools of Urban Morphology in a chronological order are:

**Email: siroos_jamali@yahoo.com*

3-1- British school of Urban Morphology: This oldest school of urban morphology is mostly based on concepts rather than theories. Some of its most important roots are in the work of German-speaking geographers. Arguably, the father of urban morphology was the geographer Otto Schlüter (Whitehand, 2007:2). Later by the middle of twentieth century M.R.G. Conzen took a major formative role and laid foundations for urban morphogenetics in the English-speaking world. His work is critical for understanding and managing urban landscapes. The main characteristics of his work are: morphogenetic method, cartographic representation and terminological precision. The most important though, are the concepts he developed, some as "burgage cycle", "urban fringe belts" and "market colonization". He describes his complete method as three pronged, to include the town plan, building fabric, and the pattern of land and building utilization (Conzen, 1978:113-116).

3-2- Italian school of Urban Morphology: Typomorphological studies in Italy began in the late 1940s by Saverio Muratori. He saw the roots of architecture lie not in the fantastic projections of modernists, but within the more continuous tradition of city building which prevailed from antiquity until the 1930s (Moudon, 1994:290). For Muratori the structure of cities could only be understood historically with building typology as the basis of urban analysis. Caniggia, Aymonino, Rossi are some of the figures that followed Muratori, however they did part from their master in their interpretation of the crisis of modernism. For the Italian school the goal research is to establish a correct formulation of the design process, and in fact Muratori talks about "operational history" in this case.

3-3- French school of Urban Morphology: The third school whose most representative members are Jean Castex, Philippe Panerai and Jean Depaule, supported by Henri Lefebvre, emerged in France in the late 1960s. This school rose out of a reaction against modernist architecture and its rejection of history (Moudon, 1997:5). The French school stands between the Italian and British schools and addresses issues of both design and the city-building process (Moudon, 1994:301).

3-4- Criticizing Typo morphology: Some professionals and scholars have criticized morphological studies on several counts. Some planners and designers simply find them excessively tedious. They also lament the fact that their research is almost exclusively concerned with historic city cores and small historic towns. Geographers complain that the non-quantitative bias in urban morphology obliterates its potential use for predictive purposes. Furthermore Italian urbanists claim that morphological analyses only apply to case of historic prevention (Moudon, 1998: 141).

4- Conclusion and suggestions

All the three schools of urban morphology build up an intellectual framework for thinking about the built environment considering the historical context of the city.

The English school offers an approach to researching how the built landscape is produced. The Italian school provides a theoretical basis for design and planning within the age old traditions of city

building and finally the French school outlines a new discipline combining the study of the built environment with critical assessment of design theories. They all claim that understanding the built environment is possible through three fundamental dimensions: form, time and scale. The English geographical urban morphology has not dealt in detail with individual building types; geographical, as opposed to architectural, influence has dominated. There is no parallel to the detailed evolutionary typological research that has developed in , for example, Italy and its close links with planning and architectural practice (Larkham,1998:167).Although the three schools differ in their socio-cultural roots and use different intellectual subjects and methods, but all together they provide a serious and useful tools in the study of urban forms and built landscapes , backing up the researches in the field of practical design. They should be reread and refined carefully by designers and planners in order to derive creative methods and ideas for managing and designing the built environments.

Keywords:

Urban Morphology, Typomorphology , Urban Tissue , Built Environment

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