Chapter 14

Handbook of Research on Urban and Territorial Systems and the Intangible Dimension: Survey and Representation

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ABSTRACT

Surveying has always been closely linked to the definition of cognitive framework to which it is connected. Carrying out a survey has always meant representing the geometry of the context of interest but also thoroughly investigating the historical dynamics, the tangible, behavioral, and performance-based characteristics. The dimensions of comfort, usually associated with the private, domestic environment, now extends to the urban and territorial context too: perhaps going beyond the sense of the threshold referred to by Walter Benjamin when he described the city as a house with its living rooms. A new concept of habitable city has developed, where we can live, according to Ortega y Gasset, not simply a place for estar (being) but for bienestar (wellbeing).

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The basic materials of city planning are: sun, sky, trees, steel, and cement, in that strict order of importance.

Charles-Edouard Jeanneret-Gris, dit Le Corbusier

INTRODUCTION

In 1960 Kevin Lynch published The Image of the City. The text disseminates the doctrine of George Keepes and had an immediate success. For the first time, they are introduce graphic expressions that can substantiate and represent thoughts and considerations that were previously only argued. Lynch talks about figuration (imageability) in terms of a sign that can evoke in the reader a strong image that refers to concepts of form, colour or location. These facilitate the formation of vividly identified environmental images that are powerfully structured and highly functional (Lynch, 2013). The author analyses the structure of some cities while representing the weaving of the elements characterized by ideograms. These are introduced via special symbols relating to Paths, Edges, Districts, Nodes, and Landmarks.

The Paths are the paths through which the observer looks at the city. They have different characteristics depending on their usability features, size, decoration, importance, etc. The Edges, i.e. the margins, are paths that serve as a boundary between different areas such as neighbourhoods in different characterization—these can be as permeable or impermeable to the transverse movement. The Districts are relatively large urban areas that are recognizable for the observer depending on their internal characterization in terms of social structure or physical. They are then identified with specific notations of the Nodes (connecting spaces, real hinges between different elements or points of thematic concentration) and the Landmarks—elements that are distinguished in urban areas because of their marked individuality. However, the graphic language is limited to the development of ideograms of extreme synthesis postponing any reference to the volumetric and architectural consistencies of the buildings.

Around the same time in 1961, Gordon Cullen published Townscape—the title of the book introduces a new paradigm—many things that would have been impossible for a detached building take place in a set of buildings (Cullen, 1976). This time the architectural space and urban space become one but often symbolical notation, abstract and reasoning leaves room for subjective iconic description that is geared to a “vedutistico” approach. The study analyses the sensitive features of urban agglomerations but most of the time the plant representations are more of a key plan that supports views rather than an autonomous survey system.

Later, in 1968, Augusto Cavallari Murat—the director of the Institute of Technical Architecture of the Politecnico di Torino—organized the full-bodied study Architecture and Urban Form in Baroque Turin. This research is characterized by its objective rigor. The language combines the discussion of the architectural space and urban space in the light of the lessons by Zevi with strict principles of scientific universality. Cavallari was aware of the studies of Lynch and Cullen (Cavallari, 1968a) and moved by a strict ordering principle at the same time to develop a language addressed to the urban survey with notations organized on three encryption levels.

The first one (which in 1974 becomes UNI 7310/74) is based on the representation of objective facts that are analysed according to the principles of the Vitruvian triad commodus, firmitas and venustas. Attention refers to volumetric characteristics, functional, and ornamental distribution. The second level
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