WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK ABOUT CENTRAL EUROPEAN URBAN MORPHOLOGY?

ABSTRACT

The viewpoint aims to define and summarize the efforts made in Central Europe - which has ever-changing borders - on the topic of urban morphology. The paper cannot cover all endeavours; it only talks about the main directions and their representatives, which are the same as the directions of the main schools of urban morphology. The viewpoint briefly touches on the idea of Central Europe and on the roots that connect the basis of Central European urban morphology, which then split into specific approaches and directions (place, region, perception) and continued to develop independently. Regarding trends, it deals more with Hungarian aspirations. It addresses the questions posed in the title separately and provides answers to them as a conclusion.
Does Central European Urban Morphology exist? Is it a regional or territorial phenomenon?

Central Europe as a phenomenon needs an explanation since every period (Medieval, Early Modern, Modern) had its definition of Central Europe. And in the twentieth century, we come across several interpretations that define Central Europe from a geopolitical, geographical, or possibly cultural point of view. Eve Blau calls the social, cultural, and geopolitical demarcation of the end of the nineteenth century ‘Habsburg Central Europe’ in the territory of the former Austria-Hungary and then identifies it as Central Europe. Central Europe is not a delimited area. It is an imaginary space, as Péter Hanák referred to it, and it was called into existence by desires and anxieties. According to Ákos Moravánszky, both the historians Péter Hanák and Jenő Szűcs formulated those factors that are dividing the three sections (East, Central, West) of Europe. These factors could be the distinctive similarities of urbanization and modernization as well. Elements of identity creators are the economic, social structure, aesthetic concepts, universal/territorial (local, national) language of forms (architectural language and urban planning) in Central Europe at the second part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century until the collapse and dismantling of Austria-Hungary.

Moravánszky asks: ‘Is Central Europe an illusion, a political program, or a regionalist catchword based on the uncertain concept of genius loci?’.

In Habsburg Central Europe, theorists and practitioners of the time dealt with urban analyses and form analyses, including spatial aspect and spatial structures. Camillo Sitte was one of the key figures of urban planning, and his work still has an impact on contemporary urban planning, emphasizing the importance of reconstituting continuities with the past and reinstating enclosed spaces, aspects that did not remain intact in the twentieth century. Sitte created the typo-morphology of Italian plazas, which he used in his urban planning handbook. Josef
Stübben established the practical principles of town planning in his manual, Der Städtebau (1890), focusing on the hierarchy of open spaces, such as streets, squares, and green areas, and classifying them according to their function. The conception and thoroughness of his work, the character of the descriptions and illustrations, and the explanation of the urban development principles were ahead of their time, anticipating the practice of urban morphology from the second half of the twentieth century. From the 1880s onwards, Antal Palóczi discussed urban planning practice (Budapest as an example) and modern urban design principles, classifying the urban spaces and squares in the manner of Stübben.\(^5\)

By analyzing contemporary towns in the territory of the former Habsburg Central Europe, this analysis places the types of transformations of the fabric into a historical perspective, using a common set of criteria. The complex methodology prepares the common ground for comprehensive comparative studies. One part of the methodology is an integrated urban morphology that the writer of these lines discussed in her monographic study of Central European cities.\(^6\) Within this method, the morphological study consists of several steps, distinguishing between types of fabrics, identifying them, and then describing their main characteristics. The urban tissue analyses of 70 towns in Habsburg Central Europe with the integrated urban morphology method revealed 11 main urban tissue types, with a total of 41 types and subtypes characteristic for the era and territory. For a more in-depth study of the neighbourhood, the method of micro-urbanism shall be applied. To define the urban types, the urban typology matrix is used. The final urban typology distinguishes nine major urban types and three subtypes.

The dismantling of Austria-Hungary in 1920 marked the beginning of national states and territorial urban morphological research in the former territories of the Empire. The analytical research of settlements became fragmented from a territorial and disciplinary point of view. Until World War II, the morphological research of settlements (villages)
was one of the most important research subjects in urban geography in Hungary. In the early endeavours of morphological research, the influence of German urban geographers is recognizable. Tibor Mendöl, in his work (Mendöl, 1936), developed functional morphology, which examines the relationship between the population’s occupational structure, social situation, and the morphological appearance of the built environment. In the post-WWII period, the urban geography research of functional morphology faced a decline, but it returned to popularity in the 1970s. From the 1960s, urban morphology research with an architectural perspective also began, mainly by the lecturers of the Budapest University of Technology who focused on the art of squares and streets, architectural structure, the analytical art of architectural space, and spatial aesthetics. Tamás Meggyesi, an architect and urban planner, is one of the most influential contemporary researchers in Hungarian urban morphology. Today, several universities in Hungary have architects and urban geographers engaged in urban morphology research, exploring topics such as the morphology of contemporary cities, socialist and post-socialist periods, and open spaces. However, urban morphology is only taught as a specific course at the Faculty of Civil Engineering at the University of Debrecen.

The concept of Central European urban morphology is limited to a shorter period, characterized by intense urbanization from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. It is a distinct field of study within urban morphology that focuses on the unique characteristics and development patterns of cities in Central Europe. It has its own history and features, such as the legacy of Austro-Hungarian urbanism, the influence of socialist urban planning, and the challenges of post-socialist urbanization.

Although the legacy and influences are shared, the fragmentation of urban morphology research in Central Europe during the twentieth was result of the narrowed focus, country-oriented research, and differing
research priorities among different countries. It was not until the twenty-first century, when a common academic language and greater accessibility were established, that joint cross-border research and the creation of a common platform became possible once again. As a result, scholars and researchers from different countries in Central Europe are increasingly working together to create a common platform for the study of urban morphology in the region.

NOTES

3. Ibid.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Pregled ima za cilj da definiše i objedini napore u Centralnoj Evropi - koja ima stalno promenljive granice - na temu urbane morfologije. Namera nije da se obuhvate svi poduhvati; već da se naznače glavni pravci i njihovi predstavnici koji prate glavne škole urbane morfologije. Rad se ukratko dotiče ideje Centralne Evrope i korena koji povezuju osnovu srednjoevropske urbane morfologije, koja se potom podelila na specifične pristupe i pravce (mesto, region, percepcija) i nastavila da se samostalno razvija. Što se tiče trendova, više se bavi mađarskim aspiracijama. Ojedinačno se bavi pitanjima postavljenim u naslovu i daje odgovore na njih u formi zaključka.

KLJUČNE REČI: CENTRALNA EVROPA; URBANA MORFOLOGIJA; MAĎARSKA, REGIONALNA MORFOLOGIJA