



## *Urban morphology: An introduction to the study of the physical form of cities, by Vítor Oliveira*

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The effort to sanitize Midtown was especially targeted to the most nonconforming: the transgendered and transgendered sex workers, many of whom were people of color. For example, the mayor and chief of police drafted a citywide anti-prostitution ordinance that would have harmed transgendered sex workers in Midtown. After much debate, the ordinance was voted down. Nonetheless, the fact that the ordinance was even considered highlights the strong strain of racist transphobia that exists in Atlanta. Midtown's lesson is that planners must make sure that the voices of the marginalized and nonconforming gay and transgendered communities are audible. Planners should achieve "a broader awareness" (p. 152) incorporating the full range of views and groups as "valid participants" (p. 152).

"Pragmatic Politics of Multicultural Democracy," by David Laws and John Forrester, is the best chapter in the book. To illuminate the importance of listening to everyone, Laws and Forrester focus on West Amsterdam, a troubled and densely diverse borough with more than 130 nationalities and ethnicities. Efforts to use soccer matches to improve relationships between non-Western groups (Moroccans, Antilleans) and native Dutch residents initially failed. In fact, they led in one case to a huge fight including bottle throwing. Martien Kuitenbrouwer, president of the borough of West Amsterdam, eventually was able to broker a peace, but she had to patiently listen to both sides. Laws and Forrester highlight the importance of having a good mediator/listener: "The encounter of mutual accusations giving away to reciprocity of recognition and even apology demand a level of engagement hardly possible when neighbors [simply] barbeque or play football together" (p. 105). The chapter made me more optimistic about the prospects for multiculturalism even when sharp ethnic differences exist. In general, community residents have the skills to resolve problems with a little help from outsiders.

While I have focused on two of the chapters, others provide critical insights into other multicultural issues such as planning in Native American communities, the impact of majority-minority cities, and how historically Black colleges and universities planning programs seamlessly incorporate black issues into the planning curriculum. The book pulls no punches; it underscores the challenge that urban planning faces to get multiculturalism right. The challenge most importantly begins with a willingness to get to the know those who are different and to hear their voices. Michael Buraydi's book helps us to move in the right direction.

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**Urban morphology: An introduction to the study of the physical form of cities**, by Vítor Oliveira, Cham, Switzerland, Springer, 2016

Urban morphology as a field of knowledge has grown substantially over the past 3 decades, but there has not been a growth in the number of books about this subject. This gap has now been filled by Vítor Oliveira's book. In fact, this book constitutes a manual of urban morphology, essential for students who are beginning their studies in this field, as well as for seasoned researchers, especially those who are interested in a new look at concepts and methods.

Vítor Oliveira is a well-known researcher on urban morphology with an international reputation. He is a member of the International Seminar on Urban Form—the first international organization of urban morphologists—and is also one of the editors of the *Journal Urban Morphology*. He is also

founder and the president of the Council of the Portuguese-Language Network of Urban Morphology (the International Seminar on Urban Form's regional group). Oliveira's goal is

to introduce the reader into the wonderful world of the study of the physical form of cities [and is] ... directed to researchers, academics and students of M.Sc. and Ph.D. courses where urban morphology is a fundamental theme, including geography, architecture, planning, engineering, and also history, archaeology and sociology. (p. 1)

*Urban Morphology* deals with urban areas or, more precisely, with their physical form. This is a very old object of study, because most cities have a long history. In addition, we have to remember that urban areas now dominate as urbanization keeps increasing. Currently half of the world's population lives in cities and their surrounding areas. Therefore, it is difficult within one single book to provide a comprehensive description of different urban physical forms, especially if you also want to deal with urban morphological research methods as well. I liked Vítor Oliveira's approach because he carefully chose examples, maps, diagrams, and photographs treating all scales from the building to entire regions.

The book presents the main elements of urban form—streets, urban blocks, plots, and buildings—that structure our cities, with illustrations and a discussion about the key actors in the physical transformation of cities (developers, architects, builders, planners, and politicians) and the processes shaping morphological change. Oliveira uses a common framework to describe and interpret the evolution of the urban forms, from the first Sumerian cities to the industrial metropolises of the 19th century.

Oliveira concentrates on contemporary cities, with a focus on New York (United States), Marrakesh (Morocco), and Porto (Portugal). New York's great urban expansion is seen as strongly influenced by the plan of 1811. This plan proposed a new layout for the city and its expansion, having as reference a grid of 12 avenues and 155 streets, with a plot structure well defined for each block and rigorous rules on building alignment. The plan for the former New Amsterdam also considered Broadway (the exception to the linear concept for streets and avenues); Union, Herald, and Time squares, and the world famous Central Park. Marrakesh, a city dating back to the mid-11th century, has an urban form completely different from that of New York and is a good example of an Islamic city because of its medina. Porto, Oliveira's city of birth, is a medieval city with an 18th-century urban expansion that is very much related to its economic importance for wine commerce (and the mineral discoveries in Brazil) and the industrialization process in the next century. Porto's urban form is marked by (a) Ribeira near the Douro River, the main port of the city until the 19th century; (b) the Baroque buildings, whose construction was supported by gold and diamonds coming from Brazil; (c) the work developed by the *Junta das Obras Públicas*, the public agency created by the Marquis of Pombal responsible for urban planning and management until 1804; and (d) the houses called *ilhas*, built for the industrial workers. *Ilha* neighborhoods consist of rows of houses built on narrow and long plots and connected to streets through strips of open private space, located on the back of larger bourgeois row houses meeting the street. This chapter allows the reader to travel with the author through the three cities, thus becoming acquainted not only with their form and landscape but also with how they have been developed over time.

After this initial focus on urban forms, agents, and processes, Oliveira approaches the history of urban morphology, the science of urban form. This chapter is important because it highlights major authors (e.g., Saverino Muratori, M. R. G. Conzen, Kevin Lynch, Gordon Cullen, Aldo Rossi, Bill Hillier, and Julienne Hanson) and different approaches (e.g., historical-geographical, process-typological, space syntax, and space analysis). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the importance of developing multimethod approaches for comparative analysis. Oliveira summarizes a study of his own that applied four morphological concepts (morphological region, typological process, spatial configuration, and cell) to an area of Porto defined by the street Costa Cabral.

Oliveira next discusses the relationship between theories on the one hand and practice on the other (i.e., both architecture and urban planning), showing the existence of a stronger link to planning than to architecture. He also stresses that mainstream planning practice is not sufficiently informed by urban morphology and that, as a consequence, it lacks a solid theoretical and methodological body to deal with the physical form of cities. Oliveira advocates reinforcing the relationship between research and the planning practice and argues for the need to (a) communicate in a simple and direct way to planning practitioners what urban morphology has to offer to practice; (b) introduce or improve the use of urban morphology concepts in urban planning courses; (c) expand scholarship covering case studies dealing with how and where urban morphology is being used successfully; and (d) prepare effective urban morphology manuals.

In the final chapter, Oliveira advocates for closer links between urban morphology and other fields such as public health, social justice, heritage tourism, and urban energy. Such closer links would support the idea that physical form strongly influences our urban condition. Oliveira concludes by saying that

One major challenge for urban morphology in the next years is to identify and communicate, in a systematic way, its most important and morphologically specific contributions to contemporary cities and societies. This will certainly lead to the establishment of key cross-disciplinary links with different bodies of knowledge studying cities, promoting effective integrated research. (p. 184)

This is a large challenge, but this book makes a great contribution toward addressing it. *Urban Morphology* would be suitable for undergraduate or graduate courses in geography, sociology, urban studies, planning, and architecture.

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