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CITY ◆ SPACE ◆ TRANSFORMATION ◆

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5-6 July 2022, Delft.

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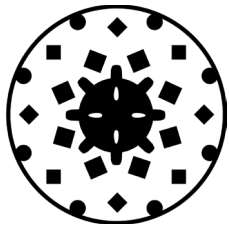

CITY ◆ SPACE ◆ TRANSFORMATION ◆

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The International Planning History Society (IPHS) is dedicated to the enhancement of interdisciplinary studies in urban and regional planning history worldwide. The theme of urban transformation is critical now due to the new information and technological revolution, the contradistinction of the neoliberal and centre-planned economy, local identity and globalisation and new roles and uses of urban heritage.

Urban history has witnessed continuous changes, which included transformations of urban plans and objects, changing images or identities of certain spaces or whole cities.

This proceedings volume follows the organisation of the conference. Each presentation comprises an abstract and a peer-reviewed full paper, traceable online with a DOI number.

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Habiter l'Habitat
Towards an ecological resilient urban lexicon

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Abstract

The paper is focused on the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural paradigm of "habitat" - as anthropological and ecological interdependency between domestic space and its environment. Since the mid 20th Century, our built environment has faced a long totalising-planetary urbanisation process, which urges us to review the old conventional urban-architectural categories we use to describe and understand our cities and countryside. In front of the urgency of a more inclusive understanding of our built environment, this paper sheds more light on the paradigm of Habitat as an interdisciplinary urban lexicon, as it gained momentum in post-war urban thinking and has influenced urban design ever since. The paper holds that the post-war discussion on Habitat represented a unique moment in which interdisciplinary thinking on the built environment became central. The paper shows alliances and resonances between the post-war CIAM's discourse on Habitat and other coeval sociological and philosophical studies to delineate a complex theoretical framework. Beyond the parameters and boundaries that have been considered and presumed conventionally within ordinary urban design and social science, the paper focuses on the complex interdisciplinary meanings, interpretations, and translations regarding the paradigm of post-war Habitat as a complex social and spatial notion which encompasses the human settlement as a whole.

Keywords

Urban Design, urban lexicon, habitat, CIAM

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INTRODUCTION

LIVING IN A CONTRADICTORY CONDITION OF PLANETARY URBANISATION

The challenging scenario of a "planetary urbanization" has taken place concretely and critically over the last decades. "Society has been completely urbanized," as the sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre already hypothesised in "La Révolution urbaine" (1970). "This urbanization is virtual today, but will become real in the future"[1] and now that time has come. Facing this contemporary and contradictory urban scenario, old categories and definitions of the built environment are either no longer viable or out-dated. In the face of the difficult legibility and the dissolution of the contemporary urban elements, our traditional images of "urban" and "city", "rural" and "countryside" – inherited from the last century - are obsolete now. As already recently highlighted by several researchers on urban studies, such as the urban theorist Neil Brenner and the geographer-sociologist Christian Schmid, we require an epistemological-conceptual shift towards a new theoretical framework.[2] It is important to surpass the parameters and boundaries that have been considered and presumed conventionally within the ordinary urban design and social sciences disciplines. In this perspective, the research on Habitat that was established in the 1950s and 1960s in the field of architecture/urban design and other disciplines - and since forgotten – is urgent also to address and to decipher the current urban processes that are emergently reshaping our urban world.

HABITAT – ECOLOGICAL LEXICON.

The contemporary ecological crisis has turned into "profound alteration of our relation to the world"[3] which requires new critical perspectives on the relationship between human beings and their physical surroundings. It forced an environmental ethic shift from anthropocentric (human-centred) to ecocentric (earth-centred)[4], focusing on the environment as a system of interrelationships of finite entities. The same 'ecology' was described by German biologist Haeckel (1866) as "the science of 'relations' between the organism and the surrounding outer world." In Architecture, Habitat introduced this relational-contextual idea through interdisciplinary nutrients of architecture like urban geography, ecology and sociology. Habitat initiated a broader approach within urban design thinking where the built environment was looked upon as a coherent, complex ecological system, with a brand new ecological and anthropological inclusive attention.[5]

In particular, in the post-war period, *the architectural debate on Habitat shifted the focus from the autonomy, isolation and differentiation of zones of cities and buildings, to the* interdependency between domestic space, city and environment. *It shifted from the Greek oikos - house - as a distinct building function to* oikos*-ecology as the "study of the Earth Household."*[6] *Human Habitat as the "whole problem of environment,"*[7] re-positioned architecture and urban design within a more inclusive, holistic, and socio-ecological approach. At the same time, it grounded architectural discipline into the interdisciplinary climatological-geographical, organic-biological and anthropological-sociological exploration of the urban landscape. The discussion on Habitat represented a unique moment in which a trans-disciplinary thinking became central.

CIAM AND HABITAT: A PRODUCTIVE AMBIGUITY

Within the CIAM context, Le Corbusier employed the term "habitat" for the first time at his introductory speech at CIAM 7 in Bergamo in 1949, claiming that it was necessary to develop a Charter of Habitat. This new architectural manifesto would have replaced or updated the previous Charter of Athens (1933), which dictated the principles of the pre-war functionalist architecture, which was based on the division of the urban structure in four main mono-functions: living, working, transport, and leisure.

The debate on HABITAT highlighted the concern about a more complex and realistic built environment, in contrast with a mere functionalist bi-dimensional zone method of planning of the city based upon function-based zones. In contrast to this sectorial division in functions of the built environment, habitat introduced a deeper interest into the complexity of the entire environment as a design topic. It propelled a shift from a universalist-sectorial approach – where the four functions where universally applicable in all conditions - to a focus on regional variations and specific local presences and identities.

However, the definition of Habitat immediately gained productive ambiguity which amplified the interpretations, the trans-national and trans-institutional flows of ideas and lastly the effects on the real built environment too. The divisions of interpretations of HABITAT also augmented the rift between young members and older ones within CIAM, even until the final breakup of the CIAM organization in 1959.

This became first clear at the CIAM Sigtuna meeting (1952), which was concerned with the "language dispute"[8] about the different meanings of 'Habitat' and 'Habiter'[9] On the one hand, the term 'habitat' for Le Corbusier constituted a substantial enrichment of the pre-war 'habiter', the pure undiluted 'dwelling' of the Athens Charter. On the other hand, the young members recognized the term including its ideological content considering that CIAM could no longer continue to regard dwelling as a separate function, but had to approach "it as an integrating part of the human settlement as a whole." Yet, Sigtuna's "wide-ranging and unfocused"[10] language dispute was destined to continue during the following CIAM meetings. In 1955, Le Corbusier tried to "suppress all misunderstanding" between "Habitat, Habiter, habitation (in French) and Habitat, living, dwelling or home (in English)," offering a final, resolute "formula" in both languages: "The Habitat represents the condition of life (the accommodation, the function) in the total environment.' L' Habitat represente les condition de vie dans le milieu total."[11] However, his attempt was not enough to patch up both the deep conceptual and generational rift within CIAM and Team 10.

INTERDISCIPLINARY LEXICON

Habitat is an interdisciplinary notion per se. The term habitat was firstly adopted in 'Systema Naturae', written by the Swedish botanist Carl von Linnés in 1735. His book was the germinating point for the modern scheme of the taxonomy of the living world, becoming a crucial topic of research for biologists, philosophers, semiologists, sociologists and for architects/urban de-

signers as well. In the post-war period, the interdisciplinary essence of Habitat, synonyms and language interpretations were highlighted by sociological, philosophical studies and theories which shared many resonances and assonances with the CIAM's debate.

For instance, in the same year as the Sigtuna meeting, 1952, the French philosopher Georges Canguilhem investigated a study about the relationship between the being and its 'Milieu'. This latter was defined by Canguilhem as "a category of contemporary thought"[12], highlighting the relevance of its discussion in the 1950s. From Newton's fluid as the intermediary between two bodies, to Lamark's "influencing circumstances" and "adaptations", Compte's "total set of external circumstances necessary for the existence of every organism", Ritter and Humboldt`s "relations between historical man and the environment", and Weiss' "environment of behaviour", Canguilhem compared several point of views, building a genealogy of the idea of milieu.

As a result, he described the environment as a "pure system of relations" at the center of required contemporary research. Indeed when faced with the dichotomy between the organic view of the world and decentered conception of the Universe, "Man is no longer in the middle (au milieu), but he is a mid-point (un milieu) (a mid-point between [milieu entre] two infinities, between nothing and everything, between two extremes."[13] Similarly, Leo Spitzer considered the term "medium" using a twofold spatial reference: "the midpoint of an object, and the intermediate point (region, substance) between two or more objects." Describing the second significance, he used the concept of "in between", resonating with Martin Buber's "Ich und Du" (1923), which became the main reference for an architectural discourse on the relationship and the in-between within CIAM and TEAM X since the 1950s.

Leo Spitzer, in 1942, also compared the different nuances of the French 'milieu', the Italian 'ambiente', the English 'environment', the German 'Umwelt', and so on. Commenting the often interchangeability of the French 'milieu' with the English 'environment', he emphasized a distinct difference which could have helped the language dispute in Sigtuna: the Austrian literary critic asserted that 'milieu' is characterized by a more subjective connotation than 'environment'. This latter is more deterministic and less personal, even though both terms indicate a certain quality: "environment is the term of a sociologist who thinks in terms of fixed factors, 'milieu' the more spontaneous expression of a human being who feels, rather than analyses.[14]

Hence, ten years before the CIAM meeting in Sigtuna, Spitzer already shed light on the different language nuances and interpretation which affected the CIAM meetings, often characterized by the slippage through different languages, meanings and interpretations.[15]

LEFEBVRE: SUBVERTING THE SIGTUNA DISPUTE

The binomial 'habitat-habiter' was embedded with the idea of everyday practice which encompasses the surroundings of the social life, sharing many resonances with the theoretical positions of the French Philosopher Henri Lefebvre.

The Sigtuna language dispute about 'habitat' and 'habiter' was also part of the discourse by Lefebvre in "L'habitat pavilionaire" (1959), where he specified that 'l'habitation' had changed with society while 'l'habiter' had been modified in relation to culture, civilization and society as a whole.

The French philosophers referred to an anthropological idea of 'habiter' which does not merely regard the single dwelling unit. On the contrary, it is a part of a whole, it is a complex practice which is related to multiple levels of social interactions. One of these levels also includes language, according to Lefebvre. Habitation is always part of a double system –"palpable and verbal, 'objectal' and semantic"[16], where the language is important but always together with and as a translation of the practical function. Lefebvre seems to escape from any semantic speculations of the term, without falling into the endless discussion of Sigtuna: "It would be too easy to arrive at the semantic system of habitation (words and connected words) by speaking of the semiological system (objects relating to habitation and their significances). None of these messages supplies the code that would enable us to decipher the other, automatically."[17] In this sense neither the pre-war functionalist 'dwelling' of Le Corbusier nor the 'poetical' dwelling depicted by Heidegger were positive, correct references, as already highlighted by Stanek.[18]

On the one hand, his critiques to pre-war CIAM were similar, coherent and coeval with the discussion which was held first within the post-war CIAM and later in TEAM X. On the other hand, Lefebvre was intrigued by the 'poetical' and phenomenological vision of dwelling, in contrast with the ravages of technology as expressed by Gaston Bachelard or by Heidegger through the words and ideas of the poet Friedrich Hölderlin.

A few years later, in 'La révolution urbaine' (1970), the French philosopher returned to the semiotic gulf between 'habiter' and 'habitat' stressing its relevance and utility: "Although the distinction between "habiting" and "habitat" is already subject to considerable controversy, I still insist that it is useful."[19]

Lefebvre continued his discourse vehemently criticizing "habitat" as a "caricatural pseudo-concept", a reductive functionalist urban thought which, at the end of the 19th Century, limited and categorized the human being in simple acts that "can't even be called animal [...]: eating, sleeping, reproducing."

"Habitat was imposed from above as the application of a homogeneous global and quantitative space, a requirement that "lived experience" allowed itself to be enclosed in boxes, cages, or "dwelling machines."

Even if 'habiter' is millenary, in the quite recent "reign of habitat", 'habiter' (habiting) was buried in the unconscious, its pivotal and original meaning of both "functional, multifunctional and transfunctional" activity all forgotten and faded into mere practice.

According to Lefebvre, 'Habiter' had to be considered "as a source of foundation" while the architect, as a "social condenser" of existing social relationships, should have the responsibility of regaining its ancient meaning.[20]

Hence, almost twenty years after the Sigtuna meeting, Lefebvre seemed to subvert and invert the critiques which characterized the language dispute between the old and young members of CIAM – represented in Sigtuna by Wogensky and Candilis- both of whom were seeking new relationships between the dwelling and its immediate environment, an epistemological shift to an anthropological understanding of 'habiter'.

If, on the one hand, the young members labelled and abhorred the use of 'habiter' as a representation of the pre-war functionalism and instead praised 'habitat' as a pivotal ecological topic, on the other, for Lefebvre only reconsidering and giving a new meaning to 'habiter' "as a source of foundation, as essential functionality and transfunctionality" could erase the erroneous predominance of the reign of 'habitat' and urbanistic rationality.

However, even if the critiques to pre-war functionalism are controversially embodied by both 'habiter' (Candilis) and 'habitat' (Lefebvre), both thinkers shared similar ideas about an ecological[21] and anthropological concept of dwelling within the collectivity, negotiating the urban conflicts raised with the hasty process of modernization. Moreover, TEAM X's DOORN manifesto for Habitat, would have praised new criteria for the planning of the everyday life, resonating many of the discourses of Lefebvre.[22]

CONCLUSION

Habitat is a complex social and spatial notion encompassing the human settlement as a whole, in all its complex material, social and spatial stratification. Habitat is a conceptual framework whose vocabulary has been analysed and reinterpreted in order to describe and design the built environment, even if with ambiguous and contradictory understandings.The discussion on Habitat represented a unique moment in which a trans-disciplinary, relational thinking about the environment became central.

Moreover, if "each language organises the urban world in a way, by hypothesis, specific,"[23] as recently defined by Topalov, the topic of language translation was inevitably also a matter of culture, of specific ways to organise and conceive the world which made the understanding of the habitat and environment even more complicated and productively ambiguous, in a dialectic synergy between architecture and other disciplines.

Finally, these interdisciplinary and parallel debates about Habitat exhibit the importance of an interdisciplinary new theoretical framework of the built environment, which encompasses different experts. The language dispute on habitat and the contradictory interpretations highlight the necessity for a deep cross-cultural interest and dynamic balance or "equipoise" between different disciplines regarding the built environment, which is often lacking nowadays. The multi-layered debate on habitat and environment shows the importance of alliances among different disciplines for the definition of an urban lexicon which could surpass conventional urban design and social sciences definitions and ways of thinking and designing our built environment.

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1. Henri Lefebvre, The Urban Revolution, translated by Robert Bononno (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). Originally published in Henri Lefebvre, La révolution urbaine (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).
2. See Neil Brenner, Critique of Urbanization: Selected Essays (Basel: Bauwelt Fundamente Series, Birkhäuser Verlag, 2016). Neil Brenner, Christian Schmid, "Planetary urbanization," in Matthew Gandy ed., Urban Constellations (Berlin: Jovis, 2012), 10-13.
3. Bruno Latour, Facing Gaia. Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 9.
4. Fritjof Capra. *The Web of Life* (New York: Anchor, 1996), 11. See Fritjof Capra. *The Systems View of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2016).
5. See Dirk Van den Heuvel ed. *Habitat: Ecology Thinking in Architecture.* (Rotterdam: Nai010publishers, 2020).
6. Hadas A. Steiner, "After Habitat, Environment." *New Geographies* 06. Grounding Metabolism. (2014): 89.
7. Alison and Peter Smithsons, "Habitat, 1956" in CIAM, Dubrovnik Scroll, Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut.
8. "On m'a reproché , même Giedion qui aurait du être le premier d'accord , d'avoir fait à Sigtuna une querelle linguistique à propos du mot Habitat." Wogensky, Letter to Sert, Paris, April 9, 1953, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, BAKE0153, Bakema Archive, g21
9. Leonardo Zuccaro Marchi, *The Heart of the City. Legacy and Complexity of a Modern Design Idea.* (London: Routledge, 2018) : 30.
10. Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 221.
11. Le Corbusier, 9 May 1955, in Alison Smithson. THE EMERGENCE OF TEAM 10 OUT OF CIAM (London: AAGS Theory and History Papers 1.82, Architectural Association, 1982), 47.
12. Canguilhem, Georges. "The Living Being and Its Environment (milieu)," *Grey Room*, No. 3 (Spring 2001): 8. Originally in French: Canguilhem, Georges. "Le vivant et son milieu," in *La connaissance de la vie.* Paris: Hachette, 1952.
13. Ibid.
14. Spitzer, Leo, "Milieu and Ambience: An Essay in Historical Semantics.", in: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 3, N. 2, (Dec. 1942): 205-206
15. See Leonardo Zuccaro Marchi , *The Heart of the City. Legacy and Complexity of a Modern Design Idea.* (London: Routledge, 2018) : 30. Moreover, it is interesting to highlight that Spitzer started his meticulous disquisition about 'milieu' and 'ambience' directly from the Swedish language and culture, like Linneus' Habitat. In opposition to dictionary definitions which present this topic as mere "petrified sediment," the author reflected upon the Swedish word "stämning" (Eng. atmosphere) as analyzed by the Swedish linguist, *Karl Michaëlsson in* 'Studia neophilologica' XII (Uppsala 1939-40) and later reconsidered in Bellessort's work, 'La Suede' (1910). "Stämning" suggests "the idea of an inexpressible harmony between men, things, and situations" and comparing with it the French neologism

'ambiance' (more intellectual, and, unlike Stämning, inapplicable to the 'état d'âme' of a human being), he found in both these terms an expression of that modern and anti-Cartesian desire to penetrate "les sombres tunnels de l'inexprimable." (The dark tunnels of the inexpressible).

16. Lefebvre, Henri. "Preface to the Study of the Habitat of the Pavillon," in *Henri Lefebvre: Key Writings, ed. Stuart Elden*, Elizabeth Lebas, Elenore Kofman, (New York: Continuum, 2003), 126 . Originally published in French: Henri Lefebvre, "Preface," in *L'Habitat pavillonnaire*, ed. Henri Raymond et al. Paris: CRU, 1966, 3-23.

17. Ibid.

18. Łukasz *Stanek*. *Henri Lefebvre on Space. Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 88.

19. Lefebvre, Henri. *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis, (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 81. Originally published in French: Lefebvre, Henri. *La revolution urbaine*. Paris: Gallimard ed., 1970.

20. Indeed, as recently stressed by Paquot, the French term 'Habiter' has a range of meanings and it is a very ancient term in comparison with 'habitat' which stemmed from botanical and zoological vocabulary only at the beginning of the 19th century. 'Habiter' derives from the Latin 'habitare', "to have often", from which " d'habitude" is derived, which gives the French term 'habitude' - "get used to" but also "remain". Only since 1050 has the verb 'habiter' meant remaining somewhere, occupying a residence. Thierry Paquot. "Habitat, habitation, habiter. Ce que parler veut dire... Caisse nationale d'allocations familiales (CNAF)", *Informations sociales*, (2005/3): 48- 54

21. As far as the biological reference is concerned, even in the 1930s, László Moholy-Nagy was interested in the intermingled experience of architecture and biology, in 'nature as a constructional model.' Bauhaus designers and ecologists agreed upon the idea of seeking a transfiguration of the natural household into the human one. Both Walter Gropius and László Moholy-Nagy were influenced by the work of evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley and enjoyed an exchange of ideas with him. Huxley considered habitat as the result of variations of thresholds or borders of ecological scales. Also Giedion relied on the biological studies of the biologist von Uexküll. This latter described the relations between the organism and its environment as "mutual belonging", highlighting their ethical dependence as well. Uexküll's theory of the Umwelt analyzes how organisms behave and relate to things through their subjective experiences in their respective environments. Umwelt is an intersubjective model, formed by a perceptual world [Merkwelt] and active world [Wirkwelt] which turns each animal into both a perceiving and an acting subject instead of a mere object. Giedion reconsidered the corporation and equilibrium of Uexküll`s Merkwelt and Wirkwelt, affirming that "the Human organism requires equipoise between its organic environment and its artificial surroundings"(Giedion, 1948). A few years later, the same equipoise will be later described by Giedion between the individual and the collective sphere, for the definition of an "Architecture of You and Me" (Giedion, 1958) and the "Heart of City" (CIAM 8, 1951).

22. See Stanek L., Henri Lefebvre on Space. Architecture. Urban Research and the production of Theory. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis, London, 2011, p. 84

23. Originally in French: "chaque langue organise le monde urbain d'une façon , par hypothèse , spécifique." Christian Topalov, Laurent Coudroy De Lille, Jean-Charles Depaule, Brigitte Marin, ed., *L'aventure des mots de la ville à travers le temps , les langues , les sociétés* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2010), XVIII.

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