Transizioni e trasformazioni: relazioni probatorie tra archeologia e morfologia urbana

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C’è stata una libera associazione tra archeologia e morfologia urbana sin dalla...

Transitions and Transformations: Evidential Relations between Archaeology and Urban Morphology

There has been a loose association between archaeology and urban morphology since its emergence. Nonetheless, it would appear relatively few urban morphologists have a proper grounding in archaeology and it seldom comes to explicit exchanges on theoretical, analytical, or purposive grounds. This is remarkable, because urban morphology, as the study of the developmental history of urban construction over time could, in certain respects, be considered as a subfield of archaeology, the discipline uniquely conceived and qualified to study human development diachronically.

In accordance with this analogy, the ‘archaeological site’ of urban morphology would be composed by the urban built environment. Next to the characteristics and rhythms of the built environment in development, kindred research targets could concern any particular state, element or aspect of urban form in the context of the city and its urban or planning tradition, socio-economic system, culture, environment, or time period. Naturally, my postulation belies the well-known respective origins of urban morphology extending across geography, architecture, and history. It is likely a fair reflection to say that urban morphologists feel that their specialist work and concerns are sooner complemented by urban history and architectural history, than by archaeology. Yet, archaeology’s engagement with the development and varieties of urbanism, cities, and urban life tends to be far more comprehensive than the typical scope of these fields. Historical archaeology uncovers the recent pasts of industrialisation and 20th century slums. Prehistoric archaeology traces the origins, characteristics, and development processes of urbanism across the globe. Heritage studies and applied archaeology seek to put knowledge of the urban past to use in the present. Meanwhile, the profound influence of landscape and contextual archaeology as well as historical ecology emplace inner urban spaces in rich worlds of events, sensory perception, behaviour, and the wider social meshworks, cultural encounters, natural resources, and environmental conditions in which urban centres are situated.

The causes for the persistent lacuna I perceive between the apparently congruous fields may be found in the dominance of present-day applications in current urban morphology and the scarcity to furnish planners and designers of future cities with useful tools and information. Moreover, where the past is concerned, the respective...
Fig. 1 - This Boundary Line Type (BLT) Mapping visualisation of a section of 6th century Chunchucmil, considered to be a densely settled Classic Maya city, shows the major stake of urban open space (excl. roadways) in structuring urban life (Vis, 2018).

As the world urbanises at rapid pace we have come to realise that the contemporary globalised blueprints for urban form and urban life are unsustainable. Global urbanisation is the...
Urban Morphological Transformation in Pre-Columbian Maya Centres and Gradually Resettled After Colonisation in a Spacious Vernacular Grid Pattern. Ciudad Caucel is the vast and dense transformative urban expansion, known locally as fraccionamiento, towards the south of the town, often featuring a degree of physical segregation (Aerial imagery taken from Google Earth).

Caucel, a town adjacent to and now amalgamating into Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico, was a pre-Columbian Maya centre and gradually resettled after colonisation in a spacious vernacular grid pattern. Ciudad Caucel is the vast and dense transformative urban expansion, known locally as fraccionamiento, towards the south of the town, often featuring a degree of physical segregation (Aerial imagery taken from Google Earth).
le transizioni e le trasformazioni urbane, l'archeologia e la morfologia urbana sono complementari nella loro ricerca, eppure devono compiere uno sforzo consapevole per raggiungere la commensurabilità nelle relazioni fra evidenze.

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Riferimenti bibliografici


Fig. 3 - The Municipality of Mérida records areas of interest of archaeological heritage. This map shows the pervasive recognition of preceding archaeological settlement (red). Archaeological heritage can only be encountered in several archaeological parks (dark green); the urban heritage use of the reserves (light green) is yet to be determined, which are maintained as recreational urban spaces. The expansion patterns of the fast growing city are otherwise entirely unrelated to past urban development (Courtesy of Esteban de Vicente Chab, Department of Archaeological Heritage, Municipality of Mérida).

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