

BUILDING THE AMERICAN CITY

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0 Abstract

The use of 'space syntax' in researching the relationship between form and function in European settlements is well known. Recently, this research has been extended to settlements of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The findings arising out of this research has fundamentally advanced our knowledge of cities. However, a significant gap in our knowledge remains - the lack of extensive research on the settlements of the United States. This paper presents new research on these settlements. It suggests that their spatial pattern is one of structure, not order as was previously thought, and one which is very well-defined. A new representation for simulating the physical growth of cities is used to demonstrate that as cities grow they tend to use a limited set of formal spatial concepts. The way in which these concepts are prioritised at different stages of growth leads to many of the physical differences in the layout of our cities. In American cities these concepts are fundamental in not only initially transforming the grid from order to structure, but also in continually bringing shape to its spatial logic over time. It is suggested that their application in successive stages of growth generates a supergrid of streets in the American settlement which are significantly longer and more connected than the supergrid of streets in a European one. This means they will not only tend to be metrically larger but also spatially shallower. In effect, through the mechanism of its supergrid the American settlement will tend to overcome metric distance by intensifying accessibility. This is shown to be fundamental in maintaining the functional logic of the grid over time by privileging the initial historical area of the grid within the overall pattern of the city.

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