

# Syntax of World Heritage Cities:

## Is it a coincidence?

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### Abstract

This study is a partial résumé of ongoing research about morphological analyses of spatial urban transformations. I aim at interpreting transformations of spatial urban culture for the selected heritage cities, i.e., Jerusalem, Venice and Mardin, by analyzing city maps. I assume that what one perceives is not necessarily what actually is. City plans act as mechanisms generating historical stories, or, texts, of specific urban culture. I will try to explore the possibilities systematically to read and understand the order of these three historical cities by discussing configurational patterns that exist. The methodological framework is based on space syntax that tries to describe and analyze the urban grammar and the ambiguity of urban architecture. I take space syntax also as a theoretical tool of spatial pattern that identifies the limits of random processes on urban form. Space syntax helps us to analyze the patterns of connection, differentiation and centrality that characterize urban systems and the relationships of parts to the whole that they bring about.

Here, urban form is assumed to arise from a continuous transformation of urban structure and history that is being considered as a generator. It is not an attempt to present a complete research on urban history or culture, but rather, a discussion on intelligibility of orders of historical / preserved cities; considering what patterns of time are sustained by quality of urban morphology, and how spatial urban pattern affects the experience of information.

The question lies in whether architecture per se (buildings and open spaces in reference to an urban milieu) or architecture specifically of the urban milieu (the deep structure of the urban form) is at issue. The urban form, as a structural entity, of a city presents itself as a fragmentary text to be blown up, to be taken in (and to) pieces, and to be despoiled further in and through various possible texts. Metaphorically speaking, space syntax and related analytic techniques imply outlining a city.

By considering the analogies between urban architecture and cinema, and between urban architecture and language, it is significant to recall that the viewer (any person in the city) collaborates in the construction of the movie or written text scheme (urban environment). Because like stop motions in cinema or literature, urban structure imposes a different order on a person's (a citizen, an architect, a guest or a tourist) own understanding sequences and freezes the real flow of time.

### Keywords

Urban space and form, transformation, cinematography

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The cinematographic way of looking is that an observer follows an imaginary line among a series of objects, through sight as well as in the mind. The architectural one is that the observer moves through a series of carefully disposed phenomena that one gets in order with one's visual sense. Those linear maps provide that one can read the deep structure of the urban environment through representation of structures – squares, streets, boulevards, grids, building blocks, water bodies, parks, etc. This idea, in itself, is obviously not new, what is significant about using space syntax to understand urban history is how configurational patterns and spatial networks are reflected and represented. It is a process of representing the 'other': the city of spaces / voids.

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