

The image of the city 1900:2000

City form is not an autonomous category, separated from space and time. Throughout its history, differing interior and exterior factors have had an influence on its development: ideological, geographical, strategic, socio-political, economic and technological factors and also life style.

At the turn of the 19th century, a city was at the centre of many theoretical discussions. Cities went through revolutionary metamorphoses, which normally caused new problems. The industrial revolution changed the mode and means of production; it transformed the economic and social structure, triggered major demographic changes and migrations from the countryside towards cities. Due to these mass migrations, cities grew rapidly (Between 1859 and 1913, the population of Vienna increased from 431,000 to 810,000 and the population of Budapest from 270,000 to more than one million!). Overcrowding significantly worsened the life conditions in cities; the demand for housing was on the increase, suburbs were spreading and the separation of living place from the workplace was causing massive transportation problems. On the other hand, city growth had positive effects, as it promoted modernization with the use of economic, technological and scientific innovations, which in turn contributed to the improvement of the general living conditions in cities. New modes of transportation (trains, bicycles, cars, trams and the metro) increased the mobility of people and goods, while new forms of communication (telephone, telegraph) and the increased flow of money and financial transactions (banks) enabled a more homogenized society. Electricity, gas, plumbing and sewage systems improved hygiene and sanitary conditions in cities.

New needs and new urban life styles called for city planning. Therefore, a new scientific division under the heading of urban planning was fostered and developed. Urban planning tried to solve the problems regarding the organization and growth of cities in a critical and also a therapeutic manner. During this period, cities profoundly changed their image, as their old form, inherited from the past, was no longer in accordance with the new circumstances. New urban suburbs at the edge of old city centres had a

more or less uniform appearance: straight, wide corridor streets, lined with buildings with uniform façades, while a city square, which used to be the heart of the city and the space where the majority of the city's public life took place and where an artistic harmony between the buildings and the square was deemed the most perfect, now became a transport junction.

Functionalism interrupted the development, which gave cities and their architecture the character and identity for millennia. It rejected all past forms and styles and tried to invent a city and its architecture anew. However, it turned out that a radical rejection of everything old in the name of the new and progress doesn't solve problems, and that the heritage of the past has to be accepted and taken into consideration, since the past can't be negated, erased or simply annihilated.

Therefore, urban planning at the turn of the 20th century reintroduces traditional values into the city form and carefully plans the traditional elements of the city structure (streets, squares and parks) and at least declaratively promotes the planning and the building of a city within the scope and context of the existing archetypal forms and the traditional architectural language. History teaches us this lesson: in the same way as a poet writes a new poem incorporating already known words or a composer writes a new piece of music with new combinations of notes or sounds known for many millennia, an architect or an urban planner doesn't need to invent a new architectural language. Instead, he or she can create new ambiances, adapted to new demands and times, by a fresh interpretation of archetypal forms. This idea is actually promoted by the theory of sustainable development and became the guideline for new urban planning strategies. This is also the guiding idea of the new Strategic plan for Ljubljana, which is now in the stage of elaboration. It builds the new image of the city on its basic historical features and at the same time takes into consideration the need for change in response to the new economic, demographic and technological circumstances and the requirements of modern life.

Dr. Breda Mihelič