

## URBAN SPACES IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

*Urban and transport planning models in Eastern Europe and the USSR: Tramways in socialist urban planning between the 1960s and the 1980s.*

### **Abstract.**

Transport and traffic development in the Eastern Bloc in the 1960s-80s was related to both public and private transport infrastructure necessities, which provoked conflicts in urban planning. Spatial planning was applied to political-economic objectives to reorganize and order people's displacement. Since traffic planning theory was a new discipline, its theory development relied on technical knowledge interchanges between countries. This, in turn, requires studying history of ideas, changes of paradigms and choosing appropriate contexts.

One of the approaches of research would be to identify global urban models, since socialist urban planning was focused on coherent and integrated planning. Some questions which arise could be: What role did the historical transport network have on urban structure formation? How were the transport technical requirements and traffic planning ideas reinterpreted? And, what effect did this have on urban space?

Firstly, an analysis of traffic planning logic, transport technology development, urban economy and planning texts, and publications are important. This is accompanied by a graphical analysis of urban plans and projects which could help to understand continuities and discontinuities within the previous planning ideas, as well as with features of urban territory.

Secondly, studying particular contexts such as historical and cultural traditions in urban planning, biographies of architects, urban planning methodology and regulations, and state-socialism politics helps to bring the results from those that are generalized to ones that are more detailed.

Generally, this combined approach is based on focusing on both spatial requirements - geography and existing urban structure and morphology, as well as on social, economic and political contexts. This is due to the fact that a similarity in urban forms makes it necessary to study planning purposes and interpretations, and a similarity in purposes could also bring different results.

**Key words:** urban space, transport technologies, traffic, urban planning, transnational history, interdisciplinary approach.

## INTRODUCTION

The research is based on studying the connection between urban, transport and traffic planning histories as there is a lack of research aimed at studying them together. The main question was to understand the conflicts in *humanization of urban space* which needed a comprehensive thinking approach of three aforementioned disciplines. There is still lack of research on this topic, and most of the research tends to give a partial vision, studying just car-oriented infrastructure development, technology development, or transport planning in particular urban places. Research still needs to consider public transport with regards to private transport systems and, urban planning in relation to transport planning. As public transport was an intermediate solution tool between car-oriented infrastructure and humanization of urban space, in this research it will be the tool to understand these dynamics and changes.

During the first year of research the aim was to construct a comprehensive discourse and find the author's own voice in the research. The first steps were to read a range of existing information including both historical documents and contemporary pieces of research. Reading and understanding historical permanencies became the main objective of the research. However, it is difficult to research socialist urban planning history where the texts and documents repeat similar information and facts. Especially as

technical questions of the planning were found to be similar during that period. Critical reading became more critical, but it was not successful as there was a need to see the whole picture, to understand general development of urban planning, economy, politics, society, etc.

During methodology selection the involvement of politics, economy, society, etc., and the complexity of these disciplines was visible. Transport planning specifically is a topic intimately related with the economy, urban economy, technology development, while traffic planning is intimately related with traffic engineering, mathematical models and calculations, etc. Urban planning itself was first, related to political decisions, knowledge interchanges, and institutional and personal influences. For this reason, it was decided to select a *multidirectional approach* which is an approach where all aspects should be considered, examined and connections should be made. In order to understand the city, it is necessary to search answer in multiple directions, as the city does not have preestablished models of thinking, its development is dynamic and asymmetrical (J. Parcerisa, 2012, p. 182).

The paper is organized with regards to general and particular topics, highlighting important issues, discussing their interpretations and the way in which they can be applied to the research. However, it does not reflect a coherent theme as the objective was to emphasize the most important questions that appeared as a result of trying to approach different disciplines and diverse countries in one topic.

#### ***Bidirectional approach.***

It was decided that the working process of research should be *bidirectional*. Bidirectional means considering both the influence of society, politics, planners, etc. and their interrelation with urban space. This is as well as considering urban territory, the physical environment and urban plans as they could represent their own logic of development and influence on urban planning decisions. Understanding this interrelation between people and urban space could help to achieve a better understanding of decisions and motivations.

The first direction of the research is concerned with producing *interpretative cartography* which is not the objective of the research itself but one of the powerful tools which could help to discover hidden logic and dynamics of territory, inertias and preexistences. Here urban space itself is a protagonist. As noted BY T. Avermaete, "Urban environment and build artefacts that compose it, actively mediate and transform social relations. Establishing relations between substantive and procedural aspects of planning" (2018, p. 484), or A. Mora "Space which contribute to produce and not just has a function to support social needs" (1996).

In many cases it is related to the formation of ideas through the form of urban plans. As J. Parcerisa noted: "The form of idea or ideas which guide urban plans, which is manifested in images, which figure the projects...urban plans are concrete gestures and visions" (2012, p. 213). The methodology which will be applied is one of graphical analysis of urban plans and projects, graphic materials which could answer the questions not found in written historical documents. Thus, it could help to recognize hidden inclinations, interests, justifications, adaptations and genuine ideas. Finally, the analysis will be put together to generate a synthetic view of city planning which could answer broader questions.

The second direction of the research is the analysis of the social, political and economic influence on the ideas of urban planning. The methodology is related to the critical analysis of historical documents, texts, and photos looking at identifying the possible influences, cooperation, justifications, and so on. The most important criteria are to analyze and evaluate the question from the perspective of a historical period. This could also be referred to as an immersion in that period, experiencing it and feeling that atmosphere. All of this comes with deep and attentive reading, not only about the planners and politics, but also about the lifestyle of people.

This should be balanced with a logical analysis and justified arguments, which could be demonstrated and proved. Although this approach may seem very straightforward, it is not simple for two reasons: *ignorance*

*and subjectivity.* The first reason is related to the questions – Is enough known about the topic? Were all important contexts identified? Is it history which contains genuine ideas or it is a collection of others' ideas?

It is widely accepted that a historian can only evaluate the history through the current period, because he is also affected by the time. This is an important value which could make the historian an evaluator and an interpreter of history. However, at the same time it requires the historian to be free of stereotypes and prejudices, and to be conscious of their own limitations and influences (this is related to the objectivity of the research). The idea of this research in selecting unfamiliar topic and unknown cities, in this case the researcher firstly should eliminate any ignorance they have about these cities, and then try to bring a new vision based on professional experience and personal intuition.

### ***Transnational history.***

The complexity of transnational history consists in the need to identify the differences and similarities inside a country and between them. The issue is to know how to reference the local variations with other general ideas in urban planning. Division of historical events and trends between different countries however, should not limit the research and just guide it. For example, while studying transnational development history in urban planning, firstly, it was important to differentiate between transport and traffic planning in the Western and Eastern Blocs. In the Western Bloc urban transport was primarily based on a car-oriented paradigm with difficulties in urban public transport coordination. In Eastern Europe, although there was official transport politics of public transport development as the tool for society collectivization, at the same time it coexisted with the imagination of car-oriented traffic development with regards to the exaggerated prediction of future car traffic growth and symbolization of social progress.

Another differentiation could be made inside the Eastern Bloc countries. Important aspects to take into consideration are: cooperation level with the USSR; economic development level; and possibility for urban and transport planning development. In relation to this, GDR and CSSR republics similarities could be distinguished which could be interesting to compare. However, other aspects such as the development of socialist ideas before the 2WW, traditional characteristics, continuity and discontinuity of ideas should also be considered. The concern for historical centers, urbanity or livable urban space started to appear with more intensity in these countries. Street and urban environment conflicts tried to be reconsidered with regards to the proportions and dimensions of urban space convenient for people. Thus, public transport and traffic had found new methods of planning. These national features could not develop during the postwar period when it was necessary to resolve present – day problems and started to be visible during the *socialist urban planning theory formation* period during the mid-1960s.

This transnational approach could also be seen in the structure of the thesis. The first part is dedicated to transnational and national level urban planning issues, while the second part is dedicated to local level decisions represented in case studies. General trends will be examined at local level and local level results will be put at transnational/national level again.

### ***Interdisciplinarity - Establishing the matrix of relationships.***

Urban history requires studying cities as nodes of relationships between people, space, and the research methods used to examine them. Urban planning history is an interdisciplinary field with contributions from multiple disciplines (C. Hein, 2018, p. 4), as urban planning is a discipline which was and is based on different theories. Putting the three disciplines of traffic, transport and urban planning in history and identifying the level of interaction in urban space production is the main objective of the research. Other disciplines like geography, social sciences and, cultural features should also be considered, but only in relation to the research question. This hierarchy is important as it helps to lead the research and to gather clear results. The difficulty in the research also consists of the inclusion of a variety of disciplines such as

political decisions, technological development, economic studies, transport industry and companies, transport policies and regulations which are full of descriptions and explanations, numbers and rules. Therefore, it was important to select from them only the important aspects which had a spatial effect on cities.

All of these three disciplines had their own planning principles and criteria. Firstly, traffic planning with traffic flow continuity which established different kinds of attributes such as accessibility, proximity, connectivity, etc., in relation to urban planning. Transport planning and its technological development level which contribute to traffic organization and establish spatial requirements of its functioning in urban planning. When it comes to urban planning, finding an adequate spatial solution for the adaptation of these requirements became the main objective. As it was noted, all these decisions were intimately related with the social, political and economic conditions of these countries.

On the other hand, interdisciplinarity requires understanding general development patterns in urban planning methodology. The period of the 1960s-80s is related to the scientific paradigm which identified the approaches and results of urban planning. A scientific-technical revolution became the basis for future-oriented planning, utopias, and the application of technical-scientific concepts.

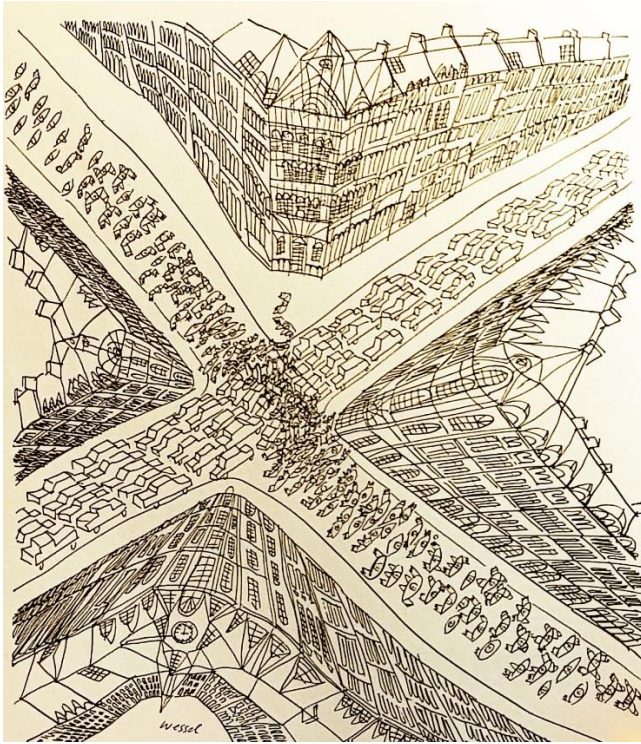
In this question two measures against a car-friendly paradigm in the Eastern Bloc could be highlighted: public transport politics and a concern for social needs/humanization of urban space. Superposition of two paradigms, car-oriented and public transport oriented in urban planning of Eastern Bloc countries, requires finding conflicts and giving explanations. As giving explanation is one the important and difficult tasks of the research, compared to description of the events.

### ***Identifying unusual contexts***

Urban history research is full of invisible contexts. Therefore, research is based on the reading of both urban planning and transport planning literature, comparing them and defining controversial issues. In this research one of the contexts which appeared was in relation to the power of planners' decisions and the weakness of official directives. In other words, the difference between urban planning theory which was censured and ideologically correct, and urban planning practice which depended on the question to follow or the rejection of urban theory. This intensified the importance of the history of movement of ideas with the focus on planners' and institutions' contributions. However, it is difficult to know to what extent planners had something realized according to explicit objectives, or whether there were hidden objectives?

The paradoxes identified during the research when Western and Eastern Europe had different objectives regarding urban transport policy and had similar results – motorized traffic-oriented infrastructure. However, while they had similar objectives in wanting to improve the environmental qualities of the city starting from the mid-1960s, they had different results in urban planning. Understanding the way of thinking is a very complex task that could not be restricted to studying the biography of urban planners, the travel visits between countries and the quantity of letters and cooperation between planning institutions. It should be related to the context and antecedents of appearance of ideas which could help to establish the qualitative dynamics in planning history.

One of the approaches used in this research is an interview method, which could help to catch the spirit of the time, understand invisible aspects which are usually not documented and written in papers. However, there is also ideological oblivion, stereotypes, social lies, the memory maligned by interest, distorted life stories, etc. that must be taken into account in the work of the interviews, but there is also the issue of collective representations and the processes of social life, something even more difficult. Sometimes historical photos could also document the events, represent visions and perceptions. It is also interesting to pay attention to the planners' critics during that period, which could help understand planners' concerns and give clues as to the direction of the research (Pic.1).



**Pic. 1. Car and pedestrian traffic conflict in the city. Source: G. Wessel, 1985.**

### ***Identifying phenomenon in case studies.***

Phenomenon is a decision in urban planning based on new ideas which changed the regular way of thinking. In this research, the phenomenon is when integral thinking between urban and transport planning took place. The impulse for such decisions could be due to the political or economic importance of the place, its environmental features, or the contribution of urban planners. In the research some cities presented the importance of the paradigm shift, like Dresden which was bombed and considered as an example of an “ideal socialist city”, or Erfurt which on the contrary was not bombed and because of the rapid industry development needed changes in urban structure. Different due to their backgrounds, spatial organization, and city size, they had different transport and urban planning policies: Dresden, with its continuous struggle for the renovation of its historic center and the possibilities for change; Erfurt, with the need to change the urban model for further urban development. The comparison of case studies should not be based on a comparison of formal decisions, which could lead to homogeneous results, it should be based on comparisons of intentions, ideas and contexts which could explain the urban planning process and recognize its significant features.

### ***Conclusion.***

In general, urban history research is a complex area which requires both sensitivity and rigor, generalization and details, maturity and predisposition for changes. This diversity brings with it different interpretations creating diverse histories, which of course should not deal with all questions at the same time and give closed opinions. Therefore, periodization and paradigm division should be considered as things which situate and guide the research question, and do not interfere with the continuous and integral research development. For this reason, constructing an efficient and simple methodology is essential as it could bring order to complex research contexts.

The complexity of the methodology of studying traffic and transport planning in relation to urban planning could be explained with the complexity of the cooperation between transport and urban planners/architects, difficulties in overcoming separated and sectorial thinking, and in general, the difficulty in the

formation of modern urban planning theory in that period. Therefore, it needs a diversity of approaches and methods of study.

This diversity in methods, contexts, case studies, however, does not mean incoherence in research, having one leading question of research as “interrelation between transport/traffic and urban planning”, with the common and transversal basis of research – tramways planning will guide the discourse of research. Applying emerging and widely discussed methodologies as transnational and interdisciplinary approaches, however, does not mean following a similar methodology or way of thinking. It simply means posing the research questions and results, widely referencing them and understanding their particular and common characteristics. Applying this methodology requires researchers’ understanding of where to intensify these methodological aspects and where they are not necessary. It is like showing motifs for playing the guitar, without exact notes. Every researcher should be able hear what the rhythm of music is, where the intensive moments are, where the slow and quiet notes are, but above all, where something is missed...

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