

# Tradition of Social Convention in City Development

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“By more intense and more frequent change of city forms, we make greater and greater influence on the lives of future generations without being able to foresee and control the long-term outcome of our actions.”

Leonardo Benevolo, The European City

## Introduction

Obviously, the fact that urban forms, structures and spaces reflect societies that have created them and epochs, in which they have appeared, is not new. This conclusion is drawn by different city and urban culture researchers (C.Alexander<sup>1</sup>, E.N.Bacon<sup>2</sup>, L.Krier<sup>3</sup>, C.Mouglin<sup>4</sup>, M.R.G.Conzen<sup>5</sup>, S.Kostof<sup>6</sup>, V.Kavolis<sup>7</sup> and others.. We would dare say even more: urban morphology, i.e. urban forms, structures and spaces reflect cultural values, intentions and mentality of societies that created them, as well as peculiarities of certain localities and paradigms of order. Contemporary city as a socio-cultural phenomenon, as well as manifold problematic reality *per se* have become the most effective and most spectacular space for revealing contemporary culture. The question, however, what kind of socio-cultural values are represented by contemporary cities and their shapes, has provoked the search for new concepts and experiences of urban developments leading to modern ideas of sustainable city. Successful fulfillment of such ideas and creation in essence are impossible without involvement of society. In the process of rapid growth and development of Lithuanian towns, the most urgent are the issues of socio-cultural values and society's role. Rapid pace and efficiency criteria of recent urban development have determined limited participation of urban society (through communities) or just formal involvement. Substantially, society is often being ignored. This generates a certain condition of social conflict, to be focused on and interpreted. On one hand, it is important to understand and define social roles within the process of development of contemporary city and its shapes in the course of history of such development, as well as at present. On the other, contemporary experience of communities' involvement is also significant especially bearing in mind that traditional city is based on social convention among many social groups and is a result of common creative activities. Traditionally, community should take an active part in the city development, and the lack of such experience should be named as a problem in Lithuania.

## Social Power Balance in Urban Development. Relationship between Society and Community.

Generally, the tradition of social convention in the city should be described as social covenant among society members in the form of certain rules to ensure the co-existence and activities of such members in a clearly defined space. This is the tradition of social dialogue and social reconciliation

distinguished by protection and fostering of social values and respect to social norms on dogmatic or normative basis. The covenant changes under the changing conditions of urban socio-cultural context, characteristic features of a venue, mentality, culture and forms of its expression, as well as paradigms of order in the light of equally intense modification of the code of social norms. The dogmatic Decalogue setting up the limits for social and individual freedom has been replaced with the declaration of social rights and freedoms, the Constitution. This particular change is in one or another way reflected in the morphological development of the city, namely, in urban layout and spatial shapes and structures. This is the result of social activities implemented by different social groups in unison throughout a certain period. Traditionally, the groups are inseparable from the city development and even its security. At different times, certain sectors of the city community delegate their decisive function to other groups. In urban history, however, there are lots of examples, when issues of basic importance have been solved by common agreement of the entire city community. Traditionally, four key social groups are involved in the city development process. In different periods of the city development, such key groups exhibit different capacities and power at their disposition. Sometimes, such groups are referred to as ‘the subjects of social power’. They include the Church, Economical and Political Elite and Magistrate in representation of the city community (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1:

Political Elite	Economical Elite	Church	Magistrate/ Self-government	Community
Power of authority	Financial power	Power of God	Administration – Market	Power of consumption and production

The influence by subjects of social power on the history of urban morphological development may be illustrated by many examples. Some are worth mentioning here. This was the appearance of a new social space in the city, in the 13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Then, after a mechanical clock was invented and introduced at about the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the city experienced the social time revolution (Lewis Mumford<sup>8</sup> and others) that preconditioned directly as well as indirectly the flourish of urban culture and emancipation of the burghers’ caste in Western Europe. In length of time, nearby the existing Cathedral and Market Square types, a representative of a new power subject, the magistrate (and self-government), appeared. And this was a new public space, the Town Hall Square<sup>9</sup>. Modern examples of the power subjects’ influence may include the appearance and distinct domination of business centers and skyscrapers in the city to represent the financial power of financial elite. Whereas within the period of dominance of political elite in the city, the Classicist ensembles in European cities and, sometimes, the entire cities were created. The influence on the urban

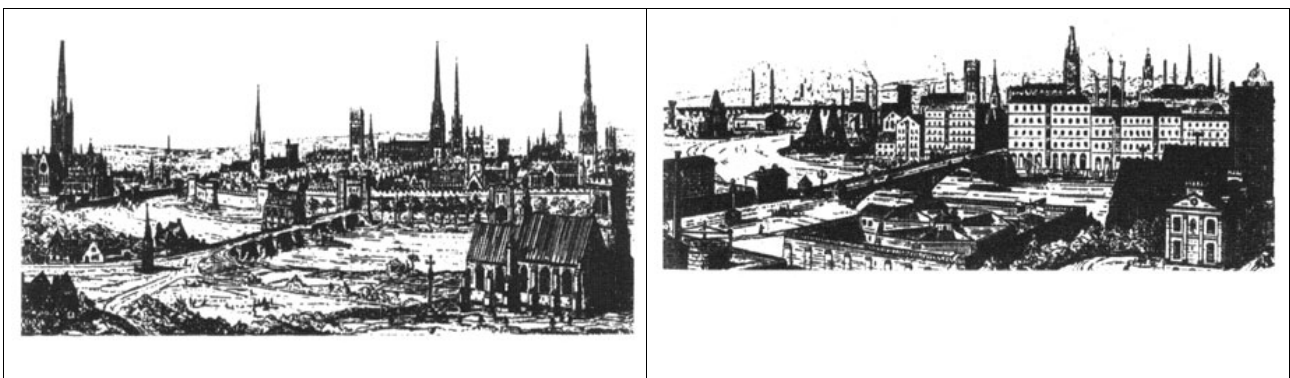
morphological development by the social power subjects is probably obvious. Often, a dominant subject would become a sentinel and guardian of the social convention influencing its modifications (from the Decalogue to Constitution) and the development of the city community itself (in transformation from community to society). Its existence and significance at different stages of urban development is obvious, although the role of community, as well as its concept in the city is the process of permanent change, starting from religious, national to professional types of community, including other concepts as well. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under the influence of new urban ideas and changing order paradigms, the community of place – location has been developing with certain influence on the development of locality, where such community dwells in the city. (This is confirmed by contemporary laws in regulation of urban planning that, as a compulsory procedure, emphasize the discussion of the layout with society at large<sup>10</sup>). There are certain signs showing that by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, city communities have started functioning as a separate subject of social power, more and more often represented with the help of modern representative architecture (Baltic Gallery in New Castle, the development of community centers as a result of *urban regeneration*). More and more often such architecture represents not only the society (*societas*), but also community's (*communitas*) needs and expectations by understanding that the society is formed of separate communities, and without this institution the society would be just depersonalized crowd or mass, only formally participating in the city development<sup>11</sup>.

### **Paradigms of Order and Their Influence on Urban Morphology**

Without any doubt, the society involved in creation of a city (all subjects of social power) is influenced by the socio-cultural context and its characteristics. The most clearly noticeable in urban morphological development is the influence by the characteristics of order. According to Vytautas Kavolis<sup>12</sup>, four concepts of order exist, two out of which belong to the order group of *nature*, and the other two to the *artificial – cultural* order group. These order concepts are manifested in nature, as well as in the development of society, and their signs are revealed not only by approaches, but also by results of urban development influenced by such outlooks. Within this scheme of order paradigms, the city appears in the clash of natural order, that of *compulsory origin*, and *artificial*, i.e. cultural order. In the genesis and morphological development of the city, a certain pressure between the natural, as a supplement to nature, and artificial, as contradictory to nature, could be clearly seen. In essence, however, traditional city IS an antithesis to *spontaneous* and elemental disorder (chaos) and is perceived as a place of order and safety, where *the laws of original order* prevail forming a basis for social convention. The Decalogue is one of such cornerstone laws, which may be illustrated most clearly by the morphology of Cathedral town and socio-cultural intention of the Medieval Europe. A town there became a reflection of heavenly order and sometimes even a shelter for freedom. Its transformation from the Cathedral town to Industrial

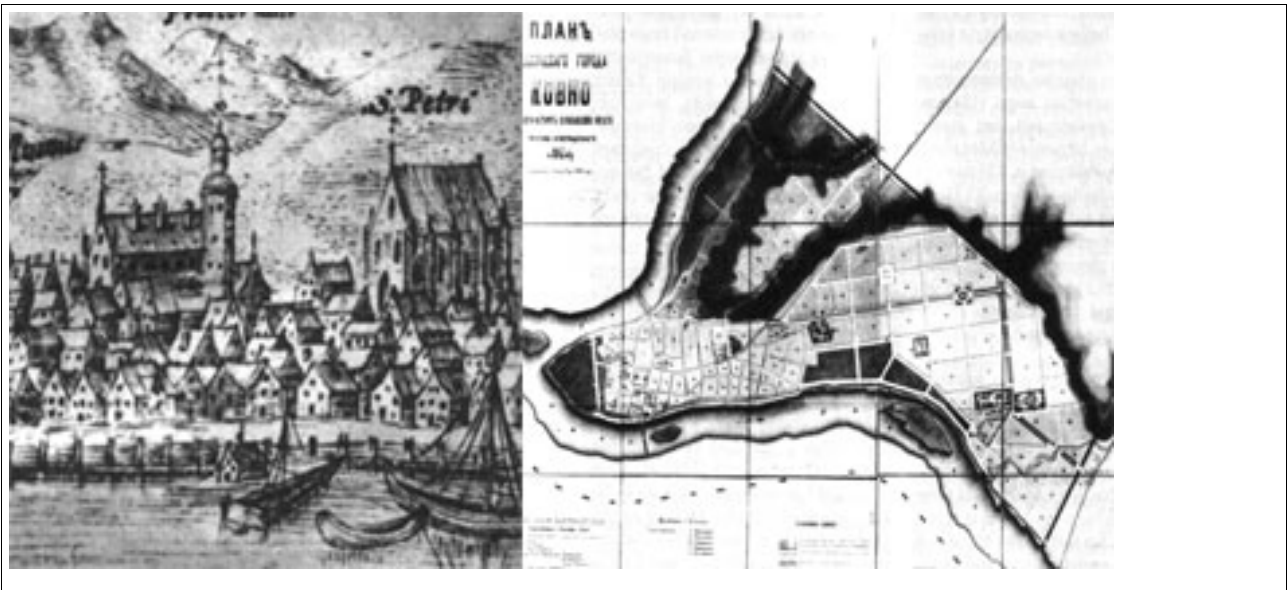
city<sup>13</sup> (see Fig. 2) signifies not only the influences by social and cultural revolutions (speaking in R.Dahrindorf's<sup>14</sup> terms) on urban morphological development, but also changes and clear modifications in paradigms of order. Industrial city is a clear reflection of a cultural paradigm of the *Factory Order*, nevertheless the first signs of its appearance were already noticeable in the morphology of the Roman military camp and later, Renaissance cities. Strict orthogonal, *Factory Order* was prevailing there, and signs of such order were characteristic to the community that had shaped it. The status and participation in the city development of the later is one of the supplementary features to establish the cultural paradigm. Further, the morphological features of the *Factory Order* were developed in the epoch of Classicism up to the Industrial Revolution. We should also notice that the Constitution as a new concept of social convention that appeared at the beg. of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, within the framework of the aforementioned urban transformation to the Industrial City (with equality, private property and other institutions fortified).

Fig. 2: Urban Morphological Transformation from the Cathedral to Industrial (according to L.Benevolo)



In the present discourse, a focus should be also made on the tradition of city picturing, where a Medieval town is still pictured as three-dimensional (human) object, and later on, starting from the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, orthogonal layout is used already for picturing of a city. Further, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a city is represented just as a scheme helping to orientate (see Fig.3). Of course, such transformation of the city picturing tradition has been preconditioned by the change of conditions for urban socio-cultural context, as well as essential expansion of the city. Such changed position of a viewer's standpoint within urban tradition is not however accidental. It shows certain changes in the perception of a city within the society's mentality, what also means a shift in cultural space forms, simultaneously revealing the position and significance of some part of culture in the city.

Fig. 3: the Tradition of city picturing: Medieval (16<sup>th</sup> century) and Modern (19<sup>th</sup> century) Kaunas (Lithuania)



If the modernistic city of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could be named an apogee of the *Factory Order*, where neither community, nor society could be seen, the predominance of post-modernist architecture and urbanism by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could be treated as prelude of the *Piece-of-Art Order*. Aforementioned sustainable city concept has emerged in result of that influence. This order paradigm contains certain naturalness, when order is not forced upon, but rather recognized, and any deviations form standards are not condemned or strictly eliminated. Predominance of that particular order concept has influenced settlement of certain city humanization issues and relevant discussions (Leon Krier, N. Saligaros<sup>15</sup> and others), by turning the city itself towards the community and society.

Fig. 4: Paradigms of Order and Urban Development

Order of Nature		Cultural – Artificial Order	
Spontaneous Natural Order	Compulsory Original Order	Factory Order	Piece-of-Art Order
Harmonious co-existence of all; cyclic time		Of organized will appraised by efficiency and standardization criteria; Time is determined	Man created - process--- traditions as collective piece of art; Time is not ongoing; different time concepts prevail
	<p><b>Decalogue, the Law</b></p> <p>Freedom through restriction; clearly defined law – clear directives – City shown as a unanimous whole, socially complete entirety (the commune, if you like), the members of which are jointly responsible for spiritual and physical wellbeing of the city. (Lot’s history in the Old Testament). The law liberates by proving clear boundaries - theological principle in the Decalogue. Coexistence covenant with Creator as a basis for social ...</p>	<p><b>Constitution</b> as a declaration of freedom and rights</p> <p>Declaration of social freedoms, rights and equality</p> <p>Co-existence covenant among society members</p>	
	Dogma – Christian Tradition		Code - Standard
Archaic Town	Antique <i>Polis</i>	Industrial City	Postmodern City
Town genesis	Cathedral Town	Modernistic City	Sustainable City

**If We Could Summarize**

Urban morphological development is inseparable from social development. In contemporary urban development, a restoration of balance between society and city development has been started by strengthening the community’s institution. In different periods, social convention in the city has been changing, depending on the domination of the social power subjects, community’s influence and on the paradigm of social order. Such influence could be clearly seen within the city structure, layout and spatial forms. With the growth of the city and community turning into society (as the entirety of all communities), the activities of city formation are usually delegated to the strongest power subject. Social convention, as a form of co-existence in the city, determines the fact that the city is developed considering the needs of communities. In the reign of authoritarian regime, such activities are totally out of control of society (due to hard situation in society, it is separated from such city formation activities; communities as integrative part of society formally do not exist or undergo the process of extermination). In democratic models of social order, many samples of society’s involvement in the city formation process exist and they all depend on following traditions of social convention, as much as different social power subjects may be jointly authorized to coordinate their activities with others.

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