



Lost, Found and Condemned - Changes and Permanences in the DNA of High Street

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Urban heritage, in some circumstances, has been cut off the 'picture' as a matter for "preservationists", not to be considered as interrelated part of trends and functional relations our societies establishes through economic, social, institutional practices and their morphological expressions and spatial distribution. When and where these fragmented views have been adopted urban heritage and its corresponding grid has been either revered in shrines or condemned as undesirable. When this is the case it is defined as obsolete, wasted, as if there were a "new start" for urban life and its urban form, shape, grid and value to be attributed at each so proclaimed "age".

A city high street is part of its urban genetic heritage as much as all the architectural monuments that may have been listed as icons of its desirable image. It is also part of the associated cultural identity, more visibly in some cities than in others. High streets have been made useful, in different historic periods, for multiple economic purposes establishing, when certain conditions were preserved, new functional spatial links between different urban areas, and allowed new social practices of survival. Changes that were made have, in some circumstances, helped to aggregate new uses and consolidate allowing necessary links between the existing grid - with all its multiple functions, shapes and values, and new urban expansions - or, in other circumstances, helped to condemn the whole lot and lose functional urban tissue and related networks of uses, meanings and values and social related constructions and expectations.

This paper explores the possibilities of another view on 'inherited' high-streets. It takes on board six here called genetic dimensions of the cultural heritage of a city and its grid, how they are intertwined in the landscape. They are the economic, social, morphological, environmental, and organizational dimensions together with accessibility as a determinant condition.

Four functional and spatial related patterns have been defined to characterize the process of sedimentation of the above mentioned genes in 'action': attraction, aggregation, consolidation and valorization. The first pattern relies on the necessary existing singularity - in any of the former six genetic dimensions, which attracts the eye and the mind of the passing observer. The second pattern deals with fruition which aggregates multiple uses and customers. The consolidation pattern follows. It derives from the multiple invested interests when and where the previous new found uses and customers were created. Value and identity built in the here described process, with negative and positive aspects established by different 'whoms' - the rich, the poor, the artists and the entrepreneurs - finalizes the sequence. These functional-spatial patterns characterize how each one of the former dimensions related to each other, what functional spatial links they appear to establish with the adjacent urban area. The DNA is here regarded as the result from establishing those recurrent functional spatial patterns.

KEY WORDS: High street, urban morphology, changes and permanencies.