



## **Town Viewed, Town Built: The Transformation of “Medieval” Prague into a “Renaissance” Metropolis**

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The paper scrutinizes the importance of a town's visibility for its urban development. A correlation between the visualization of a city and its built texture of a town may be studied on a row of examples including the creation of modern New York. In all similar cases, the urban change results from a complex cluster of economic, social and psychological factors, among which the possibilities of transmitting the visual information plays a crucial role.

During the 16th century, the town(s) of Prague gradually changed their appearance from a “Gothic” outlook to a “Renaissance” city. This change was enabled by the existence of new media, through which the information could be spread: by the diffusion of printed and illustrated architectural treatises and by the development of city views, realized in varied forms of engravings. The fact that the city was not only perceived by its immediate visitors, but could be studied from portable sources helped to realize some changes in its urban texture, especially in the famous skyline of the Hradčany hill with Prague Castle and St Vitus Cathedral. These changes took place as a result of many individual decisions - they were not directed by one central power. The only intervention of the Imperial power into the town texture occurred at the very end of the scrutinized period, in the first decade of the 17th century. It was the construction of the western gate of Prague Castle, forming a focus of inner vista, most probably inspired by Michelangelo's Porta Pia in its relationship of the new built Via Pia of the Papal Rome (the gate is turned out of the Castle, but it is orientated towards the town which surrounds it). By the construction of this gate, the Emperor aimed at a new spatial and visual relationship between the town and the Castle. At the same time, the gate crowned the axis of the emerging Hradčany Square, whose southern front marked the skyline of the town, dominating since this moment its most typical views. The fact that the individual buildings forming the skyline were quite intentionally built may be documented by famous views by Wenceslas Hollar, showing the new-built eastern towers of the Strahov monastery through artificial openings in the imaginary ruins of fortifications. The potential visibility of new constructed buildings could be in such instances the main reason for their construction.

Thus, the urban transformation of Prague on the eve of the modern era was not dictated by any Kunstwollen or fashion. It was deeply rooted in the complicated political relationships between the state power and municipal self-government. The visibility of the town was explored and manipulated to create a new visual order.

**KEY WORDS:** Renaissance, visibility, media, Prague.