

FORMA CIVITATIS: PLAYING WITH MEANING AND FORM

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*“Non est umbra tenebrae: sed vel
tenebrarum vestigium in lumine”*

(Brunus, 1582: 21)

The “form of the city”, so the novice Latinist would translate the journal’s title Forma Civitatis. But the correct translation is subtly different, literally “the citizenship’s statute”, whereas the “form of the city” corresponds to the Latin diction “forma urbis”. We chose the title “forma civitatis” to widen the topics belonging to the urban morphology research field and include the social aspects, the history of law and more in general the normative part of urban studies. Our intention was not to limit the journal’s scope to the urban realm, but to widen it by including the landscape and more in general the territory, hence the subtitle International journal of urban and territorial morphological studies. Yet the title’s assonance with modern languages indeed nourishes the cultural project and builds the journal’s identity by playing with form and meaning in its title. We may indeed consider the relationship between form and meaning as the keyword placed at the journal’s foundation. The plan of Musumba, capital of the Lunda Empire in Congo, as it was in 1886 and clearly inspired by the form of the turtle, was used as a model for the design of the journal’s logo (Margarido, 1970). The logo

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represents, using the language of architecture, the role of form and meaning in this cultural project. Since the structuralist approach to architecture (Eco, 1967) and to urban studies (Barthes, 1967) urban semiotics has developed into an almost autonomous discipline: in the presence of a large amount of literature, this topic cannot be left to sociological studies alone. Urban form is the consequence of architects' and planners' activities and if there is some intentionality in their work, the result must have some significance. In the absence of a written code, it could be argued that there cannot be meaning in urban form: we hypothesize a code developed by city builders through history (Smith, 2007) and hidden in urban fabric, where sometimes anthropomorphic and zoomorphic patterns appear (Guidoni, 1976). Two sculpted felidae aside of a gate bear the same meaning, 'be careful: this is an important entrance!' in a pre-Columbian city, in medieval Bergamo, in III millennium B.C. Egypt and in the Yuan dynasty China. The discussion on the recipients of urban meaning is central: across time urban spaces can pursue different levels of meaning (Rossi, 1966) and be aimed at different classes of recipients, with different purposes: to orient, to symbolize political powers, or to express spatial exclusion and inclusion. Urban meaning must differ from architectural signs which refer to one building, one set of users and one owner; the meaning of urban form, instead, is related to collective entities.

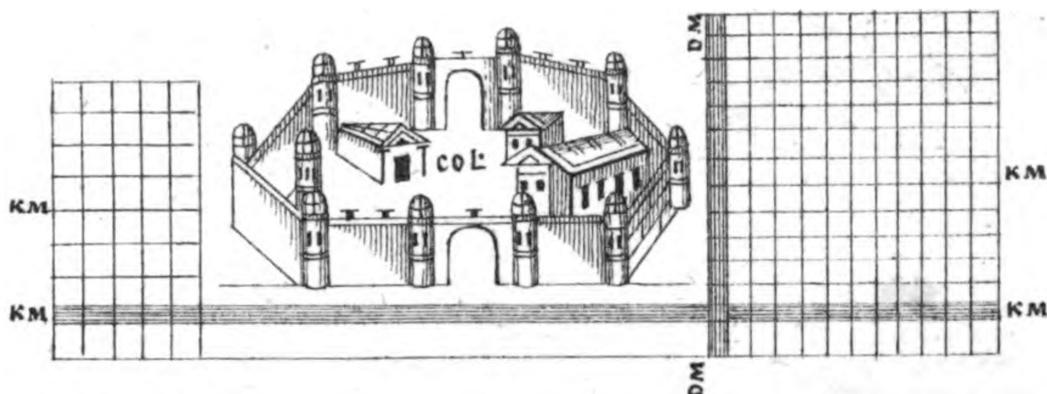
Figure 1. Leo von Klenze, The Acropolis at Athens, 1846, Neue Pinakothek, Munich.



Born in 2013 as a wide, interdisciplinary cultural project and aimed at establishing and academic publication of high standards, the journal remained dormant for several years, hence the writer's university changes. Like a traveling monk, he always kept in his pocket the small scroll of "Forma Civitatis", and once landed in Constantinople, finally could find the strength and the collaborators to give birth to this editorial enterprise. The journal in the meanwhile received further support with two more editors, Giorgio Verdiani and Martin Hebert, and a number of heroic young collaborators, Eleonora Cecconi, Pelin Arslan and Özge Özkuvanci; without the latter, most of the research accomplishments we are achieving, including this journal, would have not been possible. The journal aims to publish scientific researches in English with a wide and interdisciplinary approach, pertaining to the study of urban and rural formative processes and characterized by the application of innovative and experimental methods.

The covered themes range from urban morphology to the history of architecture, to the theory of form, to survey, to architectural design and restoration, without excluding on the other hand, the studies in the discipline of archaeology. The contributions are articulated in different formats: articles, reviews, researches, thesis, and are curated by section editors: architecture, archaeology, history and landscape. The journal adheres to the Open Access philosophy, as part of a general policy of reducing the cultural divide of the contemporary world, it will be freely accessible online, and available in print on demand technology thanks to the publishing house's (Grünberg Verlag) kind efforts in Weimar and Rostock. The journal is accompanied by an international book series (Forma Civitatis Books, Davide Ghaleb editore, Vetralla). As for the book series, the texts in the journal are also subjected to double peer review by a scientific committee of international relevance.

Figure 2. *Gromatici veteres: the limitatio of the territory outside of a city (Lachman, 1848).*



This first issue is dedicated to large models in small urban settlements, with the aim of examining small towns, usually considered a lesser heritage, and exploring the models adopted in the ancient design process, questioning if some of them were derived from previous larger settlements. Hill-top towns are typical in most of Europe in an historical phase that begins in the X century with the fortification of towns, and is called by historians “incastellamento”. In that period several settlements seem to reoccupy archaic sites, moving from the valleys to the hill-tops and modifying the social structure of previously established villages. The historiographical querelle Villa-village has been opposing the notion of continuity to the idea of discontinuity in the evolution rural settlements in the “high” middle ages: (VI-XI cent.). Within the debate between continuity and discontinuity of classical rural settlements and the medieval castles, some small towns in different regions of Europe show analogies and close continuity between the roman villae rusticae system and the fortified hill-top towns through a hill-edge phase prior to the fortification. Some historians believe that the “incastellamento” replaced the form of the dispersed rural roman settlement system characterised by the villae rusticae. (Toubert, 1973). Others examining archaeological data recognised no persistence in rural villas after VI cent., declaring that there was no continuity between the villas and castles (Francovich and Hodges, 2003). We demonstrated that the “incastellamento” happened in Italy to control existing demic centres, founded since the Longobard dominion (VI-VIII) and that these mostly derived from the ribasification of classical fundi o late antique villas (massae), and believe that the “incastellamento” phenomena should be reinterpreted under the light of a dialectical confrontation between the old allodium and new feudal structure hence the Ottonian renovatio imperii in the IX-X centuries (Strappa, Carlotti and Camiz, 2016). Furthermore the understanding of the processual evolution of the urban centre is the premise for its contemporary development, so that the new design is the last phase of an ongoing continuous evolution of the urban tissue. Many of these settlements today need to be preserved but also to be developed: the study of their formation process is not only useful for their conservation but it is also necessary for their contemporary development. By examining the distribution of small urban hill-top/hill-side settlements through Europe and comparing them with those deriving from other contexts such as native American settlements, Japanese Castle towns, Jokamachi, Viking and Saxon Emporia this first issue questions the origin of the small town phenomena, by analysing the relationships between

climate, economy, land ownership, territorial morphology, social structure and city form. Within the questions that the call for papers was expressing we would like to recall two: how are such identified (new or old/adapted) social structures expressed in the urban and territorial structures? What differences can be found in the form and structure of different types of small towns, villages, viles, hamlets, wicks, vici, castles etc. if compared to the local territorial morphology. Each issue of the journal will be dedicated to a specific topic, so to be a monographic text.

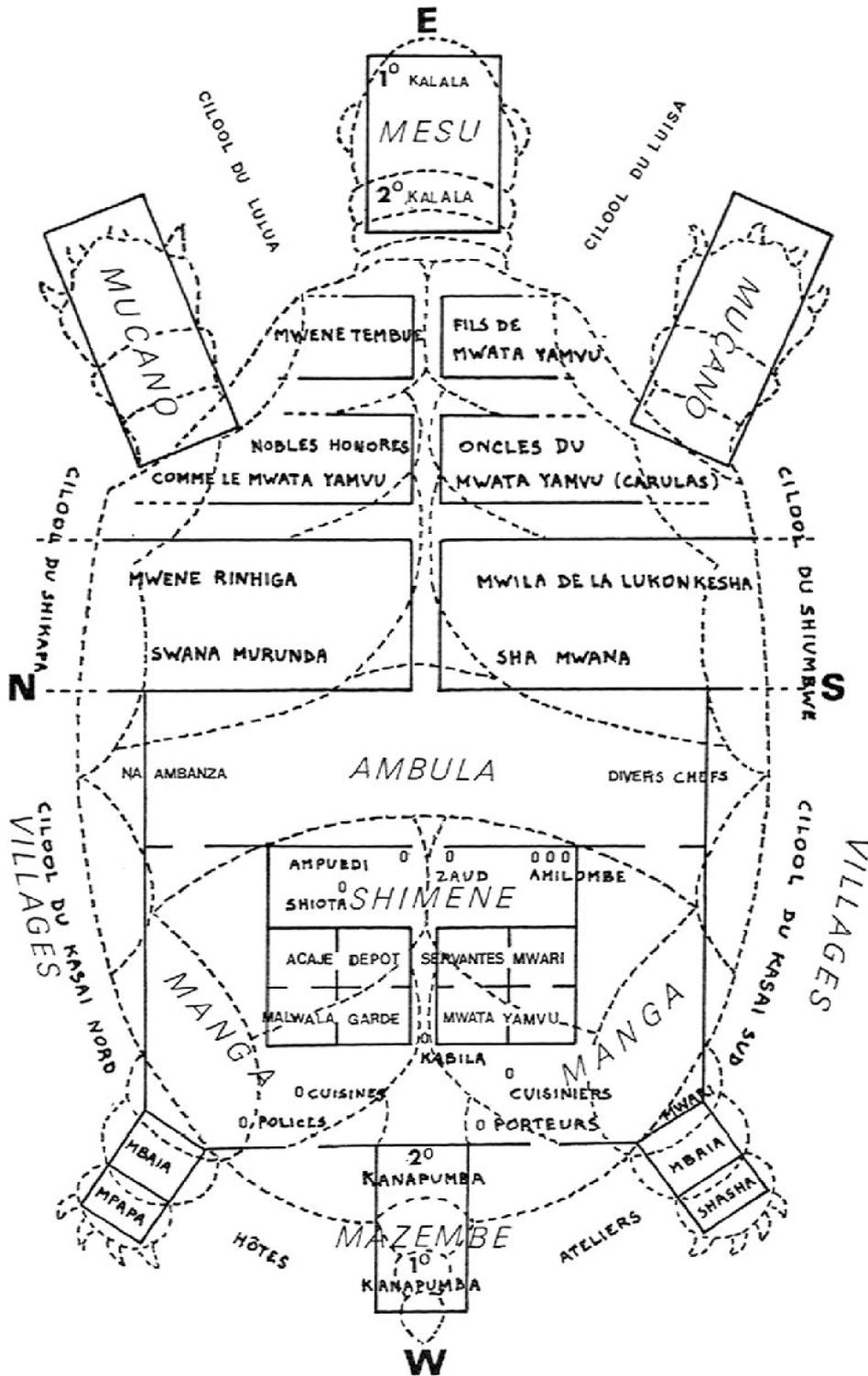
The following two issues of the journal will not be based on call for papers but will instead collect selected papers from conferences. The first one (second issue) will be titled Cities in evolution and will host selected papers from the VIII AACCP (Architecture, Archaeology and Contemporary City Planning) symposium, Cities in evolution. Diachronic transformations of urban and rural settlements which was held at Özyeğin University, Istanbul, Turkey on April 26th-May 2nd, 2021. Issue three of the journal will host selected papers from the first International conference on Pandemics and Urban Form, PUF2022, to be held on April 28th-30th 2022 in Istanbul, Turkey. The call for papers for Pandemics and the changing built environment, Learning from history, planning our future, organised by INTBAU, Nanjing University, University of Trento, Özyeğin University, University of Idaho, Kuwait University is published in this issue of the journal.

Figure 3. Gromatici veteres: individual letters which are found in different places (Lachman, 1848).



In the near future we have planned to launch specific call papers for monographic issues dedicated to the following topics: Survey and Design of Urban Form; Longue durée narratives of urban form; Contested heritage, policies and conservation. Further monographic issues may be proposed and will be considered by the editorial board.

Figure 4. Plan of Musumba, capital of the Lunda Empire, 1886 (Margarido, 1970).



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Vol. 1, N. 1, 2021

EDITORIAL

- Forma Civitatis: playing with meaning and form* 6
Alessandro Camiz

ARTICLES

- From the fortifications to the strongholds: the modifications of the defensive culture of the city “ancient régime” in relation to the birth of the modern governance of the territory* 14
Maria Carolina Campone
- The inner geography of hill-top towns: a discussion on the effects of altimetry on configuration* 26
Valerio Cutini, Valerio de Pinto
- Border, nomos, identity* 46
Stefano Lambardi
- A methodical approach to the comparative study of planted towns in 13th century meklenburg* 56
Martin Ebert
- The Cerro de Pasco effect* 68
Eleonora Cecconi
- Small towns and digital survey: virtualizing Castelvecchio Calvisio, Abruzzo, Italy* 80
Giorgio Verdiani, Stéphane Giraudeau, Andrea Leonardi

REPORTS

A Report on the 2020 ISAR International Architecture Summer School in Abruzzo 98
Tom Rankin

Conference Report: Cities In Evolution. Diachronic Transformation of Urban and Rural Settlements 106
Alessandro Camiz

THESIS

Reading and the designing the urban organism of San Vito Romano 108
Virginia Cosenza

BOOK REVIEWS

Richard Nemeč, Die Ökonomisierung des Raumes. Planen und Bauen in Mittel- und Osteuropa unter den Nationalsozialisten 1938 bis 1945 120
Martin Ebert

Eric Firley ed., Designing Change-Professional Mutations In Urban Design 1980-2020 124
Alessandro Camiz

CALLS FOR PAPERS

Pandemics and the Changing Built Environment. Learning From History, Planning Our Future 128
Alessandro Camiz

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