

## The planning-typological approach

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At the ISUF conference in Cincinnati in 2001 Gian Luigi Maffei, Paolo Vaccaro and I presented the Lexicon of the Muratorian school (Cataldi *et al.*, 2002). I tried on that occasion to summarize the conceptual connections between the key terms of the school in a 'synoptic chart'. I think it would be useful to present the chart again (Figure 1) along with some explanatory text, as my personal contribution to a comparison of the different approaches to urban morphology.

The purpose of the chart is to represent schematically and synthetically the 'Muratorian' system of thought. To be clear, it is necessary to distinguish between 'Muratorian' and 'of Saverio Muratori' to emphasize the grafting of the former onto the maestro's thought, involving many assistants and pupils over several decades. Some of us, starting from an initial adherence to Muratori's inspirational principles and sharing a vision of the world seen through the 'non-deformable' lens of architecture, have endeavoured to develop the thinking in order to make it clearer, more efficient and up-to-date, above all through our diverse individual experience of 'reading' the built environment at various scales.

I say this in anticipation of the possible objection that the chart is an unwarranted conceptual reduction of a highly complex system down to a sort of generic and fixed 'standard' theory. I maintain, however, that this attempt at synthesis provides a simple key to the system (which can be difficult to understand, particularly without access to the original Italian texts) that could help expand the numbers of potential users. There would then be a better chance of clarifying certain problematic issues and developing the system further.

It must suffice here to give just a quick explanation of the chart and direct those who might wish to examine it closer to the main texts of the Muratorian school (Cataldi *et al.*, 2002).

The synoptic chart is basically split into two closely connected parts: the first summarizes the Muratorian theory of crisis and the second encapsulates the Muratorian 'cross-table' method.

The theory of crisis gets its name from one of the most specific terms in Muratori's philosophical lexicon, which is central to the first of his two

principal texts (Muratori, 1963). He basically asserts that architecture reflects the state of civilization (more directly than any other civil or social factor) and therefore the crisis in architecture reflects a crisis in civilization. Modern architecture is the concrete expression of a deep-rooted civil discomfort, probably the most serious and traumatic in the history of mankind, whose consequences have worldwide repercussions. If we become aware of the crisis, we can only strive to overcome it with its own weapons: the critical self-consciousness of the Enlightenment that triggered the underlying processes. The crisis in itself is not an extraordinary phenomenon but a recurrent element of the cyclical process of human development. Generally speaking, it represents a moment between two cycles, between an old and a new process, with a consequent obscuring of conscious vision. This is stimulating but conducive of confusion.

In summary, the theoretical scheme lays down four sequential dialectic expressions, each consisting of binomials, whose interrelated terms are subject to a continuous process of mutual change and progressive modification. The archetype at the root of the system is the relationship between the subject 'man', in his capacity as a conscious being (naturally, 'subject' as seen from our own relative point of view), and the object 'nature'. It is a very particular relationship both because the latter term includes the former, conditioning and limiting man, and because reciprocal exchange occurs between two apparently very different worlds: the mental and the real. This gives rise to the next expression, which is fundamental to all architects, referring as it does to their principal tool, the *progetto* (a mental projection and act of creation), with its particular nature as an idea or concept that precedes and leads to the new object: modified nature. The *progetto* is particularly important because, in a nutshell, it consists of the 'building type', which of necessity comes to mind as a specific concept of a building in, and conditioned by, a particular historical moment and cultural area. The 'building type', as an *a priori* synthesis (Muratori's definition dates back to 1959), is therefore one side of a dual concept with the 'architectural organism', as an

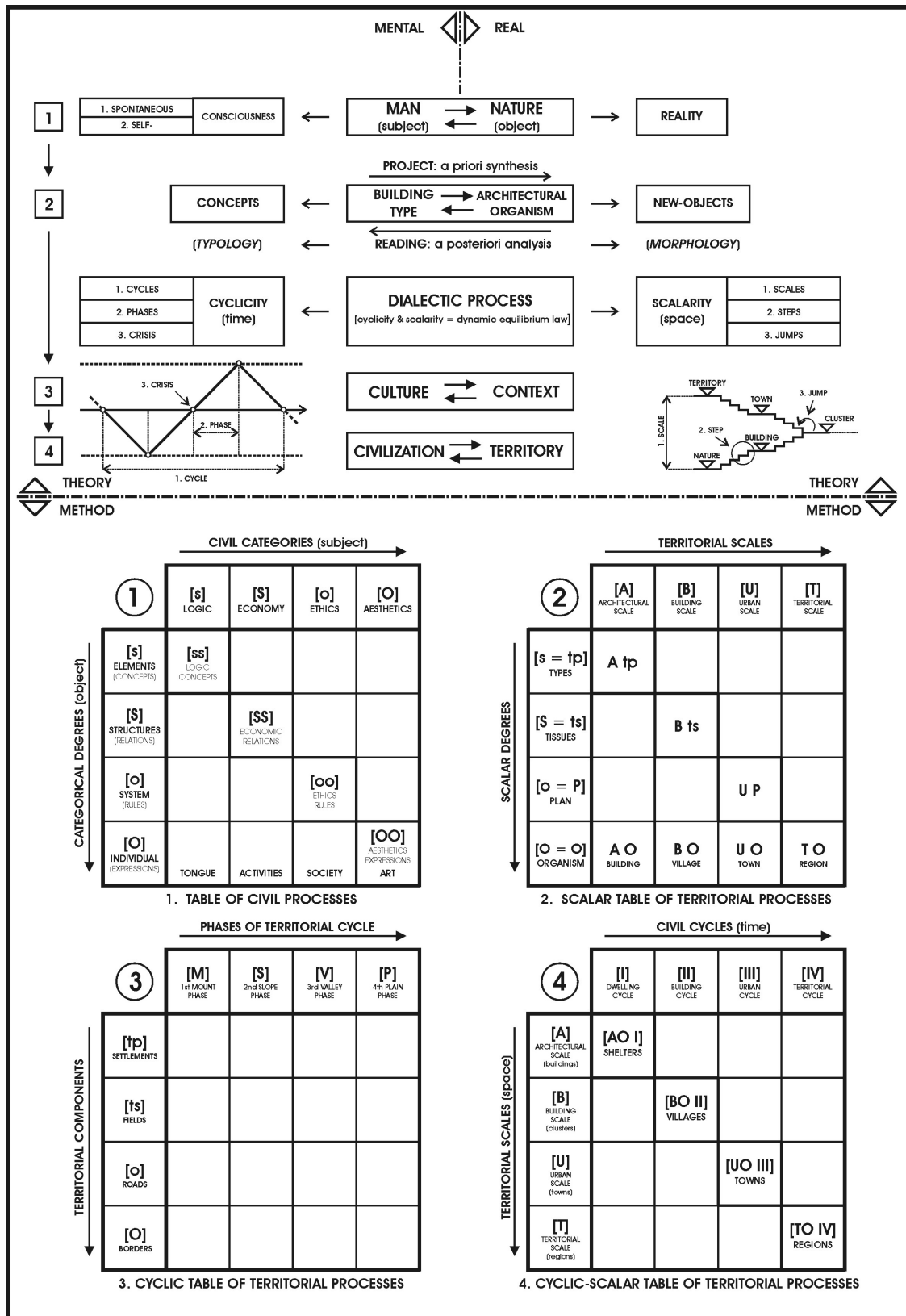


Figure 1. 'Synoptic chart' of key terms.

*a posteriori* synthesis, that is continually passing from the mental to the real, from project to interpretation (and vice versa), oscillating periodically between maximum universality and maximum individuality. The latter occurs with the subjective application of specific building types in particular times and in different places.

Placing type at the root of the dialectic processes that have led to the progressive transformation of the planet by humankind evidently implies a collective effort and transmission of unself-conscious or spontaneous experience of building, which tends toward simple, economic use of local resources to satisfy the needs of a specific society. With the evolution of culture and the passage in particular from nomadic to settled ways of life, the processes of building become more complex, requiring an increasing degree of critical consciousness. The empirical base of spontaneous consciousness is augmented by more subtle and analytical 'self-consciousness', a term that refers to the capacity of thought to become abstract and 'look in on itself'. It is not by chance that this mode of thinking develops socially in a restricted number of individuals, appearing in the historical moment of the birth of towns and the concomitant appearance of 'writing' and 'architecture'. In other words, there is a passage from a spontaneous dialectic relationship between 'culture' and 'context' to a more sophisticated reflexive relationship between 'civilization' and 'territory' (Muratori, 1967).

Let us now endeavour to understand the law that applies to everything within space and time. At its root, the dynamic nature of the dialectic process between interpretation and project is cyclical and tends to continuously return to its starting point. New objects, once produced, tend to be replicated, and continually reused and transformed, varying in the proportional mixture of continuity and change, quantitative serial multiplications and qualitative organic rearrangements. The transformed object is then the starting point for further new objects. In other words, 'cyclicity' is to time what 'scalarity' is to space: the same transformation law applies with different effects to the two different dimensional values limiting man's life: place as a conservative factor and time as an innovative factor. For the purposes of clarity, 'cyclicity' and 'scalarity' are shown in the chart using separate diagrams, a sinusoid for the former and a flight of steps for the latter. In actual fact, having identified the substantial conceptual symmetry between the constituent parts within each of the two figures ('cycles', 'phases' and 'crises' on the one hand and

'scales', 'steps' and 'scale jumps' on the other), we are led to conclude that the true model should be a dynamic integration in space and time (a sort of winding staircase that spirals progressively outward).

What I have described so far on the theoretical level finds its most coherent expression in the Muratorian method of cross-quadrupartite, cyclico-scalar 'tables' (*'tabelloni'*). Generally speaking, a Muratorian table is a bi-directional, four-sided matrix, which in its simplest version has sixteen internal squares. The two directional axes (the system's origin is conventionally placed in the top left-hand corner) indicate the component cyclical processes of the subject and object, each subdivided into four internal moments. The resulting sixteen squares of possible relations tend to exhaust the range of products generated in the complementary 'mental' spheres of civilization and 'real' spheres of territory. Each 'table' is by nature contemporaneously 'cyclical' (the last square in the bottom right-hand corner can coincide with the first square of a new cycle in the top left corner) and 'scalar' (individual squares in a table can be opened up into sixteen sub-squares with the same overall structure as the main table). The descending diagonal (from the top left to the bottom right) is the median line of maximum yield or efficiency in the process in as much as it relates and reconciles the attitudes of the subject with analogous positional values of the object.

The first two tables must be read in parallel. The most pertinent to our own disciplinary interest is the second, the 'scalar table of territorial processes', which nevertheless needs to be understood in relation to the programmes and reasons driving the formative process, as set out in the similar and complementary table of civil processes. The 'scalar table' places in systematic relation the four scales of the spatial context (architectural, relating to the single building; building, relating to the village; urban, relating to the town; and territorial, relating to the region) and the four internal scalar degrees that in each case proceed from type to organism through the intermediate steps of tissues and plan. The jump in scale is an essential mechanism whereby the last degree for a given scale ('organism' at the bottom of the table) shifts to take the first position ('types', at the top) in the subsequent scale. It is therefore appropriate to define the scales as reciprocally implicated.

The third 'table' is a cyclical continuation of the second, where the various typical scalar organisms assume the more general qualification of 'settlements' as the first constituent components of

each phase of the territorial process, along with the others – ‘tissues’, ‘routes’ and ‘boundaries’. Together they form the overall ‘regional organism’, which is transformed as it passes through the four phases of the process: the hill-top, slope, valley bottom and plain phases. This mechanism of development is based on the assumptions of Muratori’s ‘theory of ridgeways’, which hypothesizes that ancient ridge routes were the original structuring element of the territory (Cataldi, 2005).

The fourth table provides a systematic summary of the previous charts, putting into relative position the civil cycles (time) and territorial scales (space) whose progressive conception and realization (mental before real) by man characterize the major conventional divisions in history. As a final reflection, the current ecumenical cycle raises new global problems and pressing questions for human-

kind. The Muratorian concept of ‘active history’ could provide useful responses to this condition in terms of territorial self-control, sustainable development and urban quality.

## References

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## Fourteenth International Planning History Society Conference

The Fourteenth International Planning History Society Conference will be held in Istanbul, Turkey from 12 to 15 July 2010. The theme is ‘Urban Transformation: Controversies, Contrasts and Challenges’.

The conference provides an opportunity not only for a broad investigation of transformation aspects in planning history across the world, but also for sharing academic knowledge and expertise in Istanbul, the European Capital of Culture. In recent years Istanbul has become the focus for a number of transformation initiatives, which have provided challenges to urban governance, cultural and social structure, and historical preservation. Proposals of papers should preferably address one or more of the following aspects of urban transformation, but proposals that cover the full breadth of planning history are also welcome.

- Concepts of urban transformation and planning history
- Urban transformation strategies, policies, tools, management and governance
- Urban transformation and urban space (urban form, architecture, urban heritage sites, landscapes, waterfronts, public spaces etc)

- Urban transformation and land use: housing and squatter settlements, commercial districts, transportation and infrastructure
- Urban transformation and society (social inclusion, social justice, urban gentrification)
- Political economy of urban transformation
- Urban transformation and the environment (sustainable transformations, green interventions, disaster management etc)

The conference is being organized by Istanbul Technical University Faculty of Architecture and Istanbul Technical University Urban and Environmental Planning and Research Centre. The Conference Convener is Professor Dr Nuran Zeren Gülersoy ([gulersoy@itu.edu.tr](mailto:gulersoy@itu.edu.tr)). The Conference Secretary is Assistant Professor Dr Hatice Ayataç ([ayatac@itu.edu.tr](mailto:ayatac@itu.edu.tr)).

Single paper proposals, roundtables, and other modes of presentation are invited. Abstracts (in English) should not exceed 500 words, and a 200-word biography of the author(s) should also be attached. All proposal abstracts will be refereed by the programme committee. The deadline for the receipt of abstracts is 30 November 2009. Further information is available from [www.iphs2010.org](http://www.iphs2010.org)

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