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El efecto Cerdà. Ensanches mayores y menores by Ángel Martín Ramos with the collaboration of Juli Esteban Noguera, UPC, Barcelona, Spain, 2011, 335 pp. ISBN 978-84-7653-584-4.

The importance of the nineteenth-century extension of Barcelona – the *ensanche* – has been widely recognized, in particular for its ability to elicit the interest of architects who study city form and its development processes. The departure point of *The Cerdà effect on city modernization* is entwined with the research scope of the Laboratory of Urbanism of Barcelona, founded in the late 1960s by Manuel de Solá-Morales. His work was subsequently continued by a generation of architects, including the authors of this book, who were deeply influenced by him. Employing a methodical and thorough study of historical documentation, including cartography, they conduct a comparative analysis of the urban fabrics of the expansion of Spanish cities in the wake of work undertaken by Cerdà in Catalunya's capital city.

The significance of the book extends beyond the phenomenon of city expansion in Spain during the nineteenth century. Cerdà's work in Barcelona has become one of the most emblematic urban interventions, along with the examples of Paris and Vienna. It was a key point in European urban culture, reflecting the innovativeness of his colossal city building system. The approach to urban design that is outlined in the plan of Barcelona in 1859 and its accompanying theory is an important step in the recognition of urbanism as an autonomous field. The publication of Cerdà's *Teoría general de la urbanización* in 1867, before the German contributions from Stübben or Sitte, inaugurated the practice of urbanism. *El efecto Cerdà* synthesizes Cerdà's ideas about physical interventions in cities, and lays the theoretical foundation for the expansion and reform of the capital of Catalunya.

The authors develop an approach to apprehend the various manifestations of a specific urban 'device', the *ensanche*, which informs the expansion plans of Spanish cities, following the example of Barcelona. Based on a sample of twenty *ensanches* approved between 1859 and 1924, a

number of urban plans were selected. The selection was based on cases that demonstrate variations in the form of urban growth, though generated from identical principles.

The book is organized to allow detailed documentation and characterization of each individual *ensanche*, while allowing for comparison between them. Moreover, it develops the means to tackle various urban processes that display different levels of complexity.

A key contribution of the book is the production of an organized body of historical and cartographical material by various graphical means. More specifically, regardless of their type (namely explanatory diagrams, photographs or other illustrations), these graphical representations are treated uniformly to ease interpretation and comparison. Each case study entails the production of a series of interpretative diagrams, which, by themselves, constitute autonomous analytical records. As a result, the reader is enabled to compare case studies, either according to their chronological order or in relation to his or her individual interpretation grid. Hence it is possible to appreciate particular phenomena in the context of the construction process of Spanish cities, while distinguishing conceptual similarities and varying principles of urban composition spread over a number of projects of various sizes.

The analytical drawings proposed in this book, both in their content and as means of interpretation and comparison, clearly relate to the disciplinary scope of urban morphology. The starting point is a representative sample of areas, each of 12 ha, extracted for each *ensanche*. From the topographical map and aerial photographs, data were produced for various indicators pertaining in particular to the spatial arrangement of streets and buildings and in reference to the following concepts: 'terrain', 'urban plots', 'street' and 'intersection'. The results can be transposed into explanatory illustrations that identify aspects of tissue composition within urban morphological layers. A theoretical model is subsequently built that reveals in inherited spatial configurations, including articulations of public and private space, the physical traces of the evolution of the urban fabrics. More importantly, the model explains how adjustments are made when transposing an abstract system into a concrete reality.

The exercise of 'reading' *ensanches* through analytical drawings at different levels of spatial resolution reveals variations of the regular grid, and their potential to produce diverse urban layouts

by the combination of two fundamental urban elements, the street and the urban block. Moreover, the methodical comparison of the samples aids understanding of the genesis of *ensanches*. It allows identification of the variety of logical systems and diverse possibilities for urban compositions that stem in particular from the differing patterns of plot subdivision within existing blocks.

In conclusion, this book about the 'Cerdà effect' can be seen as a starting point and an invitation to investigate further the deeper implications of, and possibilities contained within, the Barcelona project. Major and minor *ensanches* have since produced some of the most important inner-city areas of today's Spanish cities. The usefulness of

this study for deciphering and explaining these spaces is matched by the richness of the illustrations and the remarkable interpretative diagrams. They, in themselves, can be considered as a valuable contribution to the contemporary reflection on urban form and composition. It is therefore fortunate that in one of its appendices the book includes an abbreviated version of its text in English, thus facilitating its international dissemination.

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Cutting into the substance of urban form

A lecture on this topic was given to the Urban Design Group by Karl Kropf of Built Form Resource Ltd and the Urban Morphology Research Group, University of Birmingham. A video of it is included in the archive of previous talks recorded as part of the UrbanNous initiative.

The lecture illustrated the common use of the core morphological concept of urban tissue or character areas. Examples included conservation area appraisals, urban historic characterizations, as well

as urban character studies, research into methods of assessing environmental performance of urban form, the French application of urban morphological analysis to the Plan Local d'Urbanisme, and the use of morphological analysis in design

The lecture can be viewed in a browser at: <http://www.urbannous.org.uk/urbandesigntgroup/UrbanMorphologyKarlKropf.htm>. The full UrbanNous catalogue can be found at: <http://www.urbannous.org.uk/udgevents.htm>

Understanding historic towns

A short course will be provided at Birmingham City University, Birmingham, UK on the origins, development and physical form of English historic towns. Comparisons will be made with towns in various parts of the world, focusing particularly on street layouts, plots and buildings. A variety of sources of information will be used, including historical and modern maps and aerial photographs. Field excursions will take place to several English towns. The course will conclude with a project in which individual presentations will provide the basis for comparison of different forms of towns across the world.

The course is based on observations undertaken on a range of site visits. Participants need to be

prepared and able to move around in the study towns. The course will take place from 18 July to 5 August 2016. The main base will be the City Centre Campus of the University. Academic status: 15 credits (7.5 ECTS / 3 US credits). English language requirement: IELTS 5.5 or equivalent (students without this competence are welcome to attend on a non-credit bearing basis). Academic prerequisites: qualified to study at university. Fee: £1800. Further information, including on how to apply, is available at www.bcu.ac.uk/international/summer-school
