

## Understanding the city through its semiotic spatialities

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**Abstract.** The city is a complex sociocultural phenomenon where space and time are simultaneously parts of itself and parts of its conceptualisation. In the paper I draw out three general perspectives where the city is characterised by different spatialities and temporalities. The urban space can thus be a space of rhythms and practices, an objectified dimension of the settlement, and a symbolic form in interpretations and creations of cities. The city can be understood as a semiotic whole by considering varying semiotic natures of the urban space.

The space of the city is semiotic — meanings are attributed to it, spatial forms are created to signify something (their functions, according to Eco 1986), the space organises and spatialises structures of urban communities and their symbolic systems. Still, the space of the city is not only a vehicle of meanings but the space of the city, the *urban space*, is also meaning generative in a specific way. The variety of spatial experiences and conceptualisations that arise from these experiences (from perception in everyday life to theoretical concepts of space) and the variety of the city ('urbanity' in the case of personal, social or cultural phenomena or environments) are mutually interwoven in semiosis related to the city. Resulting complex *urban space* is a kind of structure for sociocultural reality. Following Pitirim Sorokin's concept *sociocultural space*, this reality involves meanings, their agents, and

their vehicles as cultural, social and material aspects of urban space. While definitions of the city tend to highlight either its cultural, social or material-spatial dimensions, urban space as a variation of sociocultural space is essentially a complex that combines levels of semiotizing the urban reality and simultaneously objectivises individual and social (more or less shared) semiotic realities. In terms of modelling capacity, urban space is the model, its own object, its own material and a creative application of (partial) self-models in the society. Therefore, the city together with its spatiality and agentive capacity could be regarded as a self-sustaining modelling phenomenon.

Understanding the city as a semiotic phenomenon presumes an integrative perspective recognizing multiple levels of urban semiosis. While these levels engage different notions of *the city*, also the spatiality (characteristically exposed in the respective significance of the boundary) and temporality take various forms.

First, the city can have the role of a *quality* — ‘urbanity’ and ‘urban semiosis’ as specific phenomena or qualities. This field could properly be called ‘urban semiotics’ — as is the field named and explained in relation to regional and architectural semiotics by Alexandros Lagopoulos (1987). The city seen as a quality is described as “containing” various perceivable *elements* with diverse characteristics and meanings (for example, things, humans, animals, relations, situations, events, shapes, colours etc.). Nevertheless, or essentially, it makes up a kind of vital whole that is constituted by these seemingly random details. As a cognised whole, this city can have its edge or boundary as a distinctive feature. The end of that city lies where the contained and conceived segments stop working, either in time or space, thus creating a sense of difference between urban and rural impressions and also the distinctiveness of a deserted city. An exemplary approach attempting to analyse urbanity on this basis of recognised characteristics, can be found in urban *rhythmanalysis* proposed by Henri Lefebvre and Catherine Régulier (2009).

The second perspective would concentrate on the semiosis in the city according to its *location* (as defined first of all spatially) and the

city accordingly is a frame of reference for this view. The semiosis in the city includes as diverse topics as the semiotics of architecture and space, everyday life, society and culture in cities, signs or more specifically enunciations of sign-systems in cityscape (for a discussion on this aspect see, for example, Scollon, Scollon 2003). From this perspective, the city appears as an *objective complex*. It is a complex of objective (or objectified) phenomena, including semiotic systems; for example, the city as a centre of measurable flows of money, information; district of physical space; high concentration of buildings or inhabitation, etc. The space and time in the case of this *objectified* city function as objective substances. The boundary of this *city* can be found to be clearly statistical and also sometimes marked out clearly in the physical space. Thus, a functioning city wall is an objective material boundary of the city, functioning as a line in concentration of inhabitation, economic flows, land prices, etc. Among classical authors of urban studies, this view is characteristic to David Harvey (for example, 1994), one of the main developers of Lefebvre's earlier works, especially *The Social Production of Space* (Lefebvre 1994), and more widely to urban geography (for example, the Chicago school and GIS based urban studies).

The third type of the object in the semiotics of the city is the city as a whole — the city as a *conceptual entity* (in culture), its definitions, boundaries, naming, inception etc. (this aspect forms largely the ground for discussions on *the city in culture* (for example, Lotman, Uspenskij 1982; but also Lotman 1984) and also for *the culture of cities* (Mumford 1938). Accordingly, the city should be characterised as an *abstract cultural concept*. Furthermore, the city as a conceptual structure, symbol or an ideal model can be projected to and realised in material, social and other dimensions rather arbitrarily. The space of this city, as a cultural model or metaphor (metaphor *Heavenly city* or *Information city*), is itself a metaphoric category — *space* as an (axial, topological etc) organisation of abstract, symbolic, social, etc. relations and objects. While the objective spatial border itself is irrelevant for this city, using the previous example, the city wall functions as a materialisation of the symbolic boundary of the conceptual city. Even more, the border is

often an essential component of the metaphoric concept opposing, for example, realms of urban organisation to the barbarian rural area. In addition, there is the representational relation of some object located in the city or otherwise related to the city and representing the city as whole (for example, a stone marking the symbolic centre of the city or a map of the city in bus-stations). This can be regarded as a representation of the whole placed inside the represented unit.

In the following discussion I will turn back to these three aspects of semiotics of urban space and explicate more thoroughly the kinds of semiotic urban spaces that arise from these perspectives.

### **Urban rhythms and practices forming urban spatiality**

First, the city is an experiential whole containing and being formed by various elements, traits, events, practices etc. Such is the city that exists at the level of individual subjects and their everyday activities and practices. At the same time, more general systems form from these seemingly spontaneous actions and elements. Concentrating on the individual in the city and their practices and leaving aside the cultural aspect, the city involves mainly two systems: (1) the system of agents as social and physical beings, and (2) the system of objects, or vehicles. Both can be viewed either as semiotic or non-semiotic systems, as a system of positioning in physical not sociocultural space. Thus, practices of everyday life could be described purely physically — for example, walking as a practice presenting a route. But as Michel de Certeau (1994) has pointed out, a line on a map tracing the movement of the body is a mere trace that denies the essence of the practice that creates it — namely the act of walking and involvement of the subject as the basis for a semiotic system of walking and its realisations.

Physical actions, especially moving in space and other uses of space, can be modelled in spatio-temporal *mapping* (see Crang 2001). An important concept for the study of this temporal aspect is rhythm. Henri Lefebvre has proposed a specific study of the temporal aspect in

urban environment by *rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre 2009). The rhythms in the city include a long list of human social and personal actions, changes in environment, repeating objects, etc. In the context of this diversity, rhythmanalysis can be defined as “a description of the contrapuntal rhythms that articulate an experience of the city” (Highmore 2005: 150). In Lefebvre’s articulation it is not just a description of existing rhythms but rather a self-reflectional discovery of one’s own rhythms and their relation to observed rhythms in the surroundings. Besides the practical rhythms of everyday, Lefebvre claims to reach also the level of cultural history and large-scale practice, for example, the characteristics of Mediterranean cities in comparison to Northern French and European cities (Lefebvre, Régulier 2009). Even though this spatio-temporal rhythm might consist of complex cultural phenomena like specific coastal merchandise, as a rhythm it is working as a primary phenomenon that forms a ground for perceiving highly abstract cultural differences.

In fact, the variety of human everyday practices, as well as other rhythms, has parts that are purely physical and parts that have a special place in the sociocultural field. Thus, in the essay *Seen from the window* Lefebvre (2009) discusses rhythms as objectively observed — flows of cars and people on the street, changing patterns of colour, movements, sounds, filling of space, action or lack of it on the street, etc. Even though this observation conceptualises the rhythms noticed (as traffic, behaviour of young people, autumn in the garden), it ignores the higher level of semiotisation that takes place in the observed world — it does not ask for the aims and meanings of people filling the street with rhythmic movement, nor does it look for (self-sufficient) units.

Defining the rhythms in the city and describing urban places by describing rhythms in these is about the “visible” spatialised and objectified evidence of time. According to Lefebvre and Régulier (2009) the everyday life rhythms include three main attributes: *repetition*, *movement* and *internal measure*. These attributes seemingly open a way for objective analysis (including registering and measuring) of the temporal being of urban places. But even if the characteristics of a rhythm exist

physically, in order to be existent in the semiotic and sociocultural universe (and thus actively involved in the urban life as such), the rhythm with its components needs to be recognised and related to the known sociocultural structures. As a rhythm is composed of the repetition of events, it is first necessary that the *event* itself takes place — which is already a complex construction involving selective cognition, segmentation and memory.

To put it more generally, as far as we consider the city as a sociocultural phenomenon, for the rhythms to exist and matter as urban characteristics they need to be included in the wider field of sociocultural time, which is a part of the sociocultural universe. Although physical changes (like day and night, seasons, activity in time, etc) do exist as “rhythms” they start to carry significance for the city as a sociocultural system only when they are recognised, conceptualised and incorporated. The changes that are not incorporated, do not create a meaningful rhythmic difference in the city.

Even though urban rhythms can equally be related to the organisation of social relations as well as to the symbolic aspect of the urban world, the rhythmanalysis, as a (not really strict) methodology, seems rather to describe rhythms of easily observable social practices, like interaction, organisation of daily activities, etc. Rhythms in the city combine space and time. Rhythms that are described in urban rhythmanalysis usually have a spatial dimension and are related to the city essentially through this spatiality. Still, social rhythms, repeating social events like changes of social status during one’s lifetime can have physical spatial dimension, but are not essentially physical-spatial. Thus, rhythmanalysis has been proposed to be a methodology describing the urban space as ground and temporal phenomena as its attributes:

Urban rhythms are temporal attributes of urban space, suggesting that temporality is the most important attribute of space to be taken into account when thinking and evaluating, and to be addressed when designing urban spaces. (Wunderlich 2008: 92)

Still, the observation of objectified rhythms does not lead directly to the understanding of the city, its society and culture. Even if it is possible

to trace the whole diversity of rhythms and their physical relations in the city, only rhythms that are recognised and positioned in the socio-cultural universe define the temporal characteristics of urban space for the society and its culture. Following Lefebvre, the most valuable sight from rhythm-analysis is not the fact of rhythms existing, but relations of conceptual contradictions that arise from the conceptualisation of the place, city and the rhythms thereof — as the idea of *high speed life* in cities in combination with slow motion in traffic jams, bureaucracy, and concentrated social communication. The nature of a city and urban places lies rather in choices of rhythms acknowledged and the way these are conceptualised — positioned in relation to each other and to selected social and cultural fields.

The city and the urban environment are characterised by a huge diversity of rhythms. The multiplicity of rhythms and their study can be claimed to be a very general universal methodology for describing and analysing the nature of places and the temporality of urban places, for example: “Urban rhythms nurture a sense of time in urban places. They suggest and represent temporality. In fact, they embody time and are perceived as time in urban places” (Wunderlich 2008: 108). In fact, on the level of urban experience, the distinction of space and time should dissolve. If the city is considered as a location, also its rhythms have distinct spatial and temporal aspects and the unity is achieved via a third, shared dimension (for example, David Harvey ascribes such function to money, in Harvey 1994). The *symbolic city* (as expressed, for example, in the context of inception) can again involve spatiality and temporality as interchangeable due to their congruence in some value system.

### **Objectifying the city as a location and measure**

Even though Lefebvre’s later works were concerned with the rhythm-analytic project, his most influential work, *The Social Production of Space* (1994) is advocating — and has directed discussions (especially through the interpretations by David Harvey (1994)) to — a different

paradigm. Next to the approach of subjectively experienced, reflected, socialised, and culturalised rhythms in the city, the second approach outlined here would claim the city to be an objective phenomenon and, even more, something that objectifies subjectively realised practices. Accordingly, the space and time of the city appear being objective and universal modelling devices. In different elaborations, this view can be found to characterise many discussions in human and urban geography.

From the subjective practices themselves rises the socially shared and objectified reality of the city. Accordingly, Lewis Mumford claims that the essential and outstanding feature of the city is *drama*, especially *social drama* — that “comes into existence through the focusing and intensification of group activity” (Mumford 1938: 480). One such social drama that forms a basis for the emergence and development of cities is the market. Whether it be or not the decisive factor or the origin of cities, the market is anyhow a place for social and cultural communication, the *communication drama* as a distinctive feature of cities. Also, in relation to its periodicity and influence on the organisation of social life, the market is closely linked to the time reckoning, calendar, and thus could be a basis for the general concepts of time and temporality. Thus the market could be a connecting point of individual spatial and temporal practices from one side and abstract ideas about space, time, the world and the city as a cultural model from the other side.

The market as a central place, and its regional periodic circulation system, makes a vivid example of the general notion of the (social) concept of time and space arising from (the discourse on) common social activities and shared places. The system of markets and the respective (social) organisation of space can be modelled by a static model like *central place theory* (Christaller 1933), describing the regional spatial system of market functioning. It can also include the material dynamics of the personal (and collective) level — people physically travelling to the central marketplace. Nevertheless, it excludes the capacity to model the level of conceptualisations of space and settlements and their relation to time. Thus, the analysis of the systems of periodic markets, circulating in a region, needs at least a widened approach (Carter 1982).

Characteristic examples here are the names of the days of the week (as a period ranging from 4 to 10 days and having close connections to the regularity of markets) that in some cultures correspond to names of places, where the market was held that day (Sorokin 1964: 191). Because of the relative stability of naming in cultures, according to Sorokin, these toponyms can also serve as names for days long after that system of markets has ceased to work. Accordingly, the institutionalised social action and its spatial materialisations (as externalisations of cultural objects) are basis for the emerging universalistic model of time.

Markets play their role in physical spatio-temporal organisation of society and also in the conceptualisation of this social and environmental organisation. The internationalisation of society, and the market at its head, creates a need to universalise the system of measuring time and space. This includes rendering the understanding and usage of time and space more universal and objectified. As described in several works in human geography, the objectification and universalisation is related to technological development, to new experiences and new conceptualisations of it. For example, the concepts of *time-space compressions* or *time-geography* (see, for example, Kern 2003; May, Thrift 2001; Pred 1981) and the empirical grounds of geographical temporalities describe the technological development that forces change in the mentality of the society; at the same time, this focus on technology directs also the social reflective thinking towards the descriptions of the objective or objectifying characters of space and time. On the other hand, this strengthens the need to be aware of differentiated and separated local social times, places and value systems.

Furthermore, the reorganisation of everyday life and local social relations, the process of abstraction and universalisation also influence the urban world. In the society where everything, including space and time, is translatable to the system of capital, money can be considered as a system that unifies space and time into a specific *space-time*. It is a space-time that has one central dimension and can have an infinite number and kinds of relatively independent other dimensions, provided

they are translatable into the system of money (see, for example, Harvey 1994), otherwise it loses its coherence as a system.

Even though it might seem that the universalised space and time claim to be physical and non-semiotic, these concepts and practices as they emerged in their sociocultural contexts are already systems expressing certain world view. Thus, in addition to organising the society, these concepts of time and space are also ingrained in the sociocultural environment, especially in practices, needs, and tools accompanying internationalisation of activities. When universal space and time are legitimised and apparently desemiotized as the most normal time and space concepts, it becomes a neutral and seemingly not meaningful system — a background on which all other practical and theoretical concepts become significant (both, meaningful and highlighted; see, for example, Farrar 1997).

From the material of primary modelling, through tertiary modelling of institutionalised knowledge systems, the urban space is thus functioning as a secondary modelling system — being referential and indexical in its application and denying its specific contextual grounds.

While this objective space is largely rationalised physical space, the importance of studying the cognition and interpretation of that dimension becomes clear. Among the most influential authors regarding this aspect of the city is Kevin Lynch with his studies *The Image of the City* (1960) and *A Theory of Good City Form* (1981). Studying the observed (and thus also semiotised) space and the *structure, form* and *meaning* of urban physical space as the main features of the image of the city, he sees these features as belonging to physical space itself and strives to find universals out of socially and culturally varying images of respondents. Interestingly, the concept of *cognitive map* in Lynch's work as well as in the field of geography in general could be described as a semi-literal application of a spatial metaphor for, let's say, cybernetic decision making (see, for example, Dieberger, Frank 1998).

Furthermore, to position the *time* in the context of this approach to the city, when discussing "the time of places", Lynch (1995) studies recognised rhythms in the environment and materialised signs that

refer to the past (historicity) or future (planning). Basing the discussion on the diversity of time reckoning on biological and cultural levels, the analysis focuses on the “expressions of time” in the material environment and legibility of the space in temporal terms. The dominant element in this kind of approach is the physical space *semiotised* in *readings*. The meaning of the space is restricted to some marked elements; also the concept of *space* is here not so much a container or a holistic system, but one or a few characteristics — spatial elements that express temporality. Thus the discussion of temporality of urban space by Lynch is actually closer to rhythm-analytic ideas than to the universalising character of capitalistic space, time, and money.

### **Spatiality and temporality of the symbolic city**

This third approach often positions city into a general paradigm of (evolutionistic) development of cultures and civilizations. The city appears thus as the utmost expression of development cycles, and even as an ideal model that is itself organising the society and its dynamics. This leads also to an idea of the city as an ultimate end and deterministic ideal for the society (for example, Spengler 1998).

In his historical interpretations of cities, Mumford (1938, 1961) has claimed that there exists an essential connection of the city to time. This relation of city to time is twofold. The city is created as an expression of the culture’s ideal model of the world, as an expression of *Heavenly City* and remains connected to that ideal. However, the city is historical and history as such is created in cities. The city as a container includes artefacts from different times examining their comparison and re-use, thus giving rise to the concept of history. Time becomes visible in the city, interpreting the accumulating cues of time creates history and consciousness of past times. Still because of the origin of the city in the sanctuary and the city as a realisation of the ideal and utopia, representation of cosmos and heaven, the time of the city is partly sacred time, at least it does not pass the same way as profane everyday time.

Thus, from this perspective, the city is both historico-temporal and a-historical (Donskis 1991; Mumford 1961).

The latter, a-historical and a-temporal view can be found as an explication for the extensive monumentality of urban public buildings. In contrast, the interpretation that emphasises the materialisation of the temporal code has its counterpart in the idea of *temporality* as present in the ongoing destruction and development in the city. In line with that, a third idea of temporality in the city is connected to the agglomeration of cultural expressions, the cultural artefacts that relate to each other in synchrony and create a kind of “memory”. Accordingly, Lotman (2000: 195) states: “The city is a mechanism, forever recreating its past, which then can be synchronically juxtaposed with the present”. As Lotman’s idea is connected to his textual models, this description of the city is not just the material and practical object-city, but involves the meta-level — descriptions and conceptualisations of the city, its culture, society and history. Thus, this *cultural time* could be claimed to emerge in the process of relating oneself (as a cultural subject) to the accumulating material and mental environment in the cities. Close to this *cultural time* is the Durkheimian idea of *social time* that arises from shared periodical activities in society and the discourse about these activities and their order (for example, Durkheim 1968).

If cultural artefacts tie the city to the cultural passage of time then the cultural ideal that the city follows and symbolises creates the sacred time dimension. The city having a *heavenly twin* and its relation to the city as a cultural ideal or the model-city has been conceived as a basic underlying concept of the city in cultures (see Eliade 1954; Mumford 1961; Smith, Reynolds 1987). One of these is the *Heavenly Jerusalem* or *the city of god* in Christian tradition as presented, for example, in Revelation (as a most authoritative source in cultural history) and spread widely in folklore and several interpretations (for example, by St. Augustine and Emmanuel Swedenborg among others).

This Heavenly Jerusalem can be seen as a culture’s complex ideal model. On the one hand, it is the abstracted model of the whole society and the world. On the other hand, it is an urban model, both as a

prescription of the structure and as the holistic symbol (for discussions on the generative relation of ideal model to actual urban space, see Lagopoulos 2009; Randviir 2000). Thus, the city in the society is a kind of sacred ideal that has a relation to its heavenly twin city — which at the same time is not a city, not an urban entity at all. The spatiality and urbanity of the heavenly city (or Jerusalem) is ambiguous. Swedish spiritualist Emmanuel Swedenborg (1966) points out two understandings about the heavenly city — two realities — in descriptions of the heaven. Firstly, the human interpretation is direct, emphasises the form and sees the “city” as a city with its urban form. It also claims that the visible heaven and earth reach their ends and the New Jerusalem as a city will come with its described features. This is heavenly city as an urban structural model, expression of which can be seen in medieval town building practices and in their explanations (see Lilley 2009 for a thorough discussion). Secondly, Swedenborg describes the spiritual interpretation (claimed to be characteristic to angels) where all concrete characteristics are to be understood as spiritual values and relations, and the *city* itself should be understood as a doctrine. Here we find the concept of the city (derived from material cities and experiences of them) being in itself in the position of a model, a structural model for anything.

Thus, the *heavenly city* could be a general structural model for any complex system (also for interpreting and creating urban space). Its urban and spatial traits, however, enforce also the physical city and (everyday) experiences of it to act as a model. On one hand there is the conceptual city and its space (either conceptualised from the experience or, as another possibility, given by god) standing for complex abstract referents as a tertiary modelling system; and on the other hand, this same model enables and forces the actual urban space to act as a model in the social discourse and practices.

This ambivalence has stood long and firm in Christian worldview. In the discussion on *the City of God* (*De Civitate Dei* from 413–426) by Saint Augustine (1950), the *city* (*civitas*) can stand for the state, the society — linking the concept closely to the Roman culture — for the culture of a single “real” city. Saint Augustine opposes the *city of god* as

the place of divine creatures to the *earthly city* where people dwell in. But the discussion makes no reference to direct common sense urban features nor the material form of the city as can be found in the Revelation and is discussed by Swedenborg. Still, the text also includes, directly and indirectly, the city of Rome (and its roots in the archetypal crime of the murder of a brother), as the prototype of the city (but also civilisation) in Western culture, especially at the time of Augustine (see, for example, Augustine 1950: 482–483). Augustine is presenting a holistic model of the world, where the city (*civitas* in Latin and *polis* in the Greek in New Testament) is the natural place and focus of the people, their relations and culture. The opposition of divine and profane parts of the world, through the *city* as a marked focus, can be said to express a more general system — Christian culture that is essentially an urban culture (see also Lilley 2009: 185–187).

While discussing the *creation of the world*, the opposition of *heavenly* and *earthly* and the questions that arise from these notions, the *city (civitas)* is not a spatial concept for Augustine. Rather we could say, the spatiality is presented mostly in and is reduced to the opposition of the two spheres, two cities — and to the centrality of the city of Jerusalem that held true for the conceptual space as well as for the imagination of the physical geographical space. With some generalisation, we could say that Saint Augustine is describing one cultural model of the world, which is total and holistic with its beginning and end, and where time and space are coherent with the rest of the world system. For example, even though the City of God is supposed to be eternal, it has temporal existence only as long as the earthly world and changes thereof exist. Thus, time is dependent on temporary, earthly changes and it was created together with the world and will end with it (Augustine 1950: 350; for a discussion of Augustine's concept of time in the context of social change see Nisbet 1977: 62–103).

While the city is thus a symbolic model of the culture and the whole world, this symbolic city is also placed within a wider space as a world model and thus takes on a referential function. In the context of *map-pae mundi* there is a characteristic urban centre: "On a less practical,

more philosophical level, the map presents a unified view of the world in terms of time and space” (Edson 2007: 31). In its centre lies Jerusalem as an ideal model connecting the Earth and the Heavens and as an indexical element to which all the other cities (and other significant phenomena) can be often hierarchically related.

This religious culture focuses on highly abstract and complex matters, but the spatial world model has nevertheless its impact also on the object level on the organisation of real cities and their space — for example, on the organisation of the urban space according to its religious functions or the city as *the stage for the ceremonies for Church* (Mumford 1961: 277) — as well as on the meta-level, on the descriptions of and the reasoning about the world system and cities in it, for example on *mappae mundi* (Randviir 2003). Even though geographical space might be of secondary importance here, compared to the dominant religious cultural space (see also Lotman 1965), it nevertheless exists; the material space and its experiences are conceptualised as the material side of the religious world model. Thus, this model includes the directions for interpreting the city (both as a holistic sign and as a spatial structure, or the *name* and the *space* — see Lotman 1984), as first of all a symbolic entity.

Even though the medieval praise of the city and its space, and the hierarchical evaluative systematisation of cities have numerous similarities with today’s interpretations of cities, there are also major differences. For example, concepts like the *world cities* and the *hierarchy of world cities* (Derudder *et al.* 2003; Hall 1966; Taylor 2000) are analogically using the concept of the *city* as a dominant element in the world and applying a hierarchical structure where the ground is not religious values, but economic values based on socioeconomic practices and the interpretation of these in terms of universalistic “capital” in the general world model. While the basis has moved to socioeconomic realities, the model is lacking the holistic spatial integration. Thus, on the conceptual level the power of urban structure over the region is symbolic (see Lagopoulos 1993) and also has been exchanged for a hierarchical system of cities that are (spatially) conceptualised in a net of hierarchies

that includes cities as discrete entities but without continuous space or modelled as central point of the continuous regional (whatever the extent) space (for example, Christaller 1933). As the idea of heavenly twin has been largely forgotten, the ideal (as the ground for organisation) remains in a non-referential way inside the city itself. The religious system has been replaced by the socioeconomic while the structure of the models is persisting in a great extent.

### **Urban spatialities as *sociocultural space***

It can easily be seen that the city, its space, and its time are not quite the same for the three large approaches to the semiotic city that were presented here. On the other hand we can still apprehend the object being the same phenomenon, the same city with its diverse faces and spaces. Urban space as discussed above is close to *sociocultural space* as presented by Pitirim A. Sorokin (1964). For Sorokin, *sociocultural space* is a referential principle of sociology and social science:

Sociocultural space aims to locate the sociocultural phenomena and their components in the sociocultural universe: the component of meanings in the universe of meanings; the component of human agents in the universe of differentiated and stratified universe of human societies; component of the vehicles in the universe of sociocultural phenomena. (Sorokin 1964: 154)

At the same time, it is the reality for the subject: “It is a means of man’s orientation in, and adaptation to, the sociocultural universe — the nearest and most important to him, even from the standpoint of a mere survival value” (Sorokin 1964: 154).

According to Sorokin (1964: 148), the physical space, as important as it is in ideas about cities, has twofold relation to the sociocultural space. Firstly, it is a vehicle for the sociocultural system and its meanings. But it is the material part of this system and has any connection to the sociocultural system only through functioning as a vehicle of meaning. Thus, the physical space as system of vehicles objectifies the system of meanings, and the system of meanings itself makes vehicles socioculturally

real. Secondly, the physical space conceptualised as *physical space* is a specific product of a specific sociocultural milieu or system. Therefore, the physical-spatial side of sociocultural space is just one part of more general sociocultural space. And if physical vehicles objectify the systems of meanings in the empirical sociocultural reality, conversely, each concept of physical space is sociocultural in its essence.

As the objects in surrounding space are the vehicles (and agents) of the sociocultural system, its objectifier, the physical spatial environment, is itself sociocultural. At the same time, each culture has its general world model and concepts of space that follow its sociocultural world. This world model (for example, as the religious one in St. Augustine 1950) is essentially concerned with meanings. However, it is projected onto the physical environment and attached to physical vehicles and agents during daily activities and descriptions of environment. Thus, the general cultural world model would also be conceptualised in concrete spatial terms, and involves physical objects as well as social relations of subjects. While this point of view projects the spiritual concept of the world to the physical-geographical space (for example, religious meanings and values of cities, countries, directions and distances in Medieval Christian geographies, there is also another tendency. For the latter, practical experiential space is used as a basis for explanation. Thus, in Swedenborg (1970) the practical spatial (*earthly*) environment (including stereotypical opinions about nations and cities, human agents and vehicles like equipment for dwellings) is used as a model to be projected to the spiritual sphere (*heaven*). If the general structural concepts of physical space depend on the general background of sociocultural conditions (for example, the dominance of the homogenic geometric space concept and its opposition to the qualitative space filled with meaningful places), then the more specific conceptualisation of space, its qualitative characteristics and more concrete structure, might be to a larger extent conditioned by the concrete social level — the practices of agents that realise and objectify the meanings in space.

The city as sociocultural space integrates aspects of meanings, agents, and vehicles, as well as the physical and practiced space with

its rhythms, universalistic spatiality and the symbolic space of cultural models. Spatiality and temporality of the city are again essentially socio-cultural categories. Different spatialities of the city work as descriptive and prescriptive models to each other and in relation to other socio-cultural phenomena. Accordingly, walking practices (as in de Certeau 1994) and rhythms (as in Lefebvre 2009) as practiced or observed by an individual, are mainly related to the spatial and temporal recognisability. At the same time the spatial and temporal organisation form the basis for the recognition of spatial and temporal dimensions of phenomena. The main aim of universalising space and time has been to secure the possibility of a unitary measure, that is, the describeability of space and time (see, for example, Kern 2003). Consequently, the universalised space and time are used as a model for describing and measuring the referent of relatively abstract concepts like work, social relations, values etc. Thirdly, following from the latter, the urban space is itself a model that describes the actual reality or abstract entities such as cultural ideals, while on the other hand, the urban space becomes a cultural ideal model to be followed in creating semiotic and material reality. At the same time, the analytical categories of space and time, united through a third dimension are an indistinguishable reality at the experiential level and common and interchangeable as symbolic dimensions.<sup>1</sup>

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### **О семиотической целостности города**

Город — сложное социокультурное явление, в котором пространство и время являются одновременно как частями города, так и способами/средствами его описания. В статье очерчиваются три общих перспективы семиотики города, где город характеризуется различными пространственными и временными характеристиками. Городское пространство может быть пространством ритмов и практик, воплощенным измерением урегулирования и символической формой, на основе чего можно интерпретировать и создавать город. Город может интерпретироваться как семиотическое целое благодаря учитыванию его разных семиотических характеристик.

### **Linnasemiootilisest tervikust linna ruumilisuste kaudu**

Linn on keeruline sotsiokultuuriline nähtus, mille puhul ruum ja aeg on korruga osaks nii linnast enesest kui tema käsitusviisist. Samuti on linna kirjeldus osaks linna semiootilisest tervikust. Artiklis visandan kolm linnasemiootilist perspektiivi, mille puhul linna iseloomustavad erinevad ruumilisused ja ajalisused. Nii on linnaruum rütmide ja praktikate ruum, asustuse üks objektiviseeritud mõõde ning sümboolne vorm, mille alusel linna interpreteerida ning linna luua. Linnaruumi semiootilisuste arvestamine võimaldab ka mõista linna semiootilise tervikuna.