

MAIN SOCIO-CULTURAL CATEGORIES OF THE CITY THROUGH THE PRISM OF CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY¹

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Abstract:

The material treats basic scientific categories available in the scientific toolkit of cultural geography and in geographical science in general. They are considered in the context of the modern development of the city, especially the urban settlements with large populations. Arguments about the role of urbanization, modern unification of urban settlements and loss of identity are put to the fore. The interrelationships between socio-geographical categories such as urban landscape, heritage, geography of images, urban identity and others are viewed herein.

Key words: city, culture geography, indicators, categories, socio-culture;

PRINCIPAIS CATEGORIAS SOCIOCULTURAIS DA CIDADE ATRAVÉS DO PRISMA DA GEOGRAFIA CULTURAL

Resumo

O texto apresenta as categorias científicas básicas disponíveis no arcabouço científico da geografia cultural e na ciência geográfica em geral. São considerados no contexto do desenvolvimento moderno da cidade, especialmente os assentamentos urbanos com grandes populações. São colocados à frente argumentos sobre o papel da urbanização, da unificação moderna dos assentamentos urbanos e da perda de identidade. Também, apresentamos as inter-relações entre categorias socio geográficas como paisagem urbana, patrimônio, geografia de imagens, identidade urbana entre outras.

¹ Implemented by project RD-08-130 / 28.02.2022 r.: "Adapting the scientific, practical and applied potential of the Center for Career Development through the optimization of inter-institutional links".

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PRINCIPALES CATEGORÍAS SOCIOCULTURALES DE LA CIUDAD A TRAVÉS DEL PRISMA DE LA GEOGRAFÍA CULTURAL

El texto presenta las categorías científicas básicas disponibles en el marco científico de la geografía cultural y la ciencia geográfica en general. Se consideran en el contexto del desarrollo moderno de la ciudad, especialmente los asentamientos urbanos con grandes poblaciones. Se presentan argumentos sobre el papel de la urbanización, la unificación moderna de los asentamientos urbanos y la pérdida de la identidad. También, son presentadas las interrelaciones entre sociocategorías geográficas como paisaje urbano, patrimonio, geografía de imágenes, identidad urbana entre otras.

Palabras clave: ciudad, geografía cultural, indicadores, categorías, sociocultura;

Introduction.

According to the UN, the world's urban population is expected to increase to 61% by 2030, the number of people living in cities will increase to 5 billion by 2030, and this will have a significant impact on urban tourism as a key factor not only in the development of the city, but also in its economy.

In connection with the above, we should give some terminological explanations for categories related to the present study. We believe that such (besides identity and heritage) are also the cultural landscape, urban landscape, urban identity, urbanization, geography of images, etc. This is important as it is directly related to the comprehension, management, preservation and valorization of socio-cultural heritage and local identity for the needs of urban development. Not of least importance, the analyzed categories are directly related to each other. Often they derive from each other.

Urbanization.

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In both academic and strictly scientific geographical literature, two types of urban agglomerations in Bulgaria had been adopted until recently - "formed" and "in formation". Nowadays the term is still in use, but for a limited scope of research and in some legal acts³. A more justified and practically applicable category of a lower rank is the *agglomeration area*. Unlike the agglomeration, it has a leading city (agglomeration core) with a population of over 50 thousand inhabitants⁴. Given the general trend of population decline in the country as a whole, the agglomeration area will be representative for the better part of the country. The territorial scope of these areas is defined by the municipalities, respectively – the settlements in the area of influence of the agglomeration core (where more than 15% of the labor force commutes daily (Socio-economic Analysis of the Regions in the Republic of Bulgaria, Second Stage, 2019).

In cultural geography, the main aspects of urbanization are the various socio-cultural "nuclei" or "areas" that are formed in cities. Often they are different from each other, formed on the basis of genetic and historical-religious factors. For example, in Bulgaria, the planning and development of cities is directly dependent on the historical reasons for their formation. For instance, Petkov, Penerliev (2020) consider that: It is believed that cities emerged later than villages. Cities (urban settlements) are settlements whose population is mainly employed in industry, commerce, the service sector, governance, education, science and culture. The current Administrative and Territorial Structure of the Republic of Bulgaria Act envisages that for a village to be declared a town, it has to have a population of over 3 500 inhabitants and a relevant social and technical infrastructure. Cities emerged during different socio-economic conditions. As part of the ancient world, Greek cities existed in modern-day Bulgarian territory – mainly along the Black Sea coast, Thracian settlements occupied the interior of the country, while later Roman settlements began to appear. There are very few remains of medieval Bulgarian cities and fortresses, mostly because of their destruction by the Ottomans. Although the

³ For example the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works maintains a register of the agglomerations for the needs of certain legal acts (e.g. the Environment Noise Protection Act).

⁴ This minimum threshold is not accidental and meets the European criterion for a cluster of type "city" for the purposes of comparability between other agglomeration areas is the EU.

Ottoman Turks only built few cities, they changed the appearance of the existing ones through the construction of mosques, bazaars, madrasas, hammams, fountains, etc. The improvement of the economic well-being of the Bulgarians during the Bulgarian Renaissance period, resulted in the construction of many original Bulgarian houses and public buildings, clock towers, churches and fountains, preserved to this day in settlements such as Kotel, Zheravna, Koprivshtitsa, Tryavna, Bansko and many more. Thus, *according to the cultural and religious influence they were under, cities ended up with different overall appearance, while the terrain itself has also been a factor in urban planning.*

These aspects of cities are actually the cultural and the urban landscape that are part of their cultural-geographical development.

The urban landscape is a relatively old concept, dating since the middle of the 19th century, associated with the name of Frederick Olmsted⁵. There are different concepts and definitions of urban landscape. They are summarized by Keshtkaran (2019), according to whom an urban landscape is *"a kind of man-made environment on the natural environment which has own physical and. spiritual aspects"*. He expressed the urban landscape as an image of the socio-cultural spirit of the city along with its surrounding world. A physical space consisting of materials and forms leads to the creation of an integrated artistic space. In this space, the urban landscape as a whole art (e.g. architecture) is inherent and related to other forms of art. It can be said that the contemporary urban landscape involves dynamic and flexible relationships; temporal layering, interpenetration of landscapes, etc. This creates an unbounded and hard-to-define spatio-temporal urban continuity that is difficult to distinguish. In fact, the urban landscape includes all areas and functions of the foundation (the land) such as residential, institutional, commercial, industrial, cultural, etc.

No less important category is "heritage". And the reason is the direct correlation between it and the urban landscape.

⁵ Frederick Law Olmsted (April 26, 1822 - August 28, 1903) was an American landscape architect, journalist, social critic, and public administrator. He is considered the father of landscape architecture.

The term "heritage", as Alexieva and Bokova (2013) aptly summarize, "*represents the overall picture of natural goods or man-made goods, without boundaries in time and place*". Here we consider it appropriate to specify that, above all, "heritage" should be viewed as an anthropogenic action in the past. In our opinion, heritage is all the material goods built by society in a given place (location) during the time of its cultural development. Of course under the influence of natural conditions.

The connection between urban landscape and heritage is clear. Callari-Galli (2002), Aleksieva, Bokova (2013) and others. claim that "*the urban landscape is connected to the processes of renewal, transformations of urban spaces and its inclusion in the cultural heritage is natural and temporal*". This cultural heritage, which ultimately serves as a resource for cultural and cognitive urban tourism.

Cultural landscape.

The definition of 'heritage' surprisingly (or not) coincides to a great extent with the common apprehension about cultural landscape. We have repeatedly described this "cultural phenomenon" in our various publications (Penerliev, 2017, Penerliev, 2021, Penerliev, Petkov, 2021, etc.). Summarizing various theses, Penerliev and Petkov (2021) claim that cultural landscape has been viewed upon since the time of the emergence of cultural geography (i.e. from the beginning of the 20th century). *Cultural landscape implies a natura-culture complex formed under the influence of the general impact of nature and man on it.* Human society changes this landscape with its socio-cultural and economic activities. The German scientist Krebs, as early as 1932, described the cultural landscape poetically as: "*created on top of the natural landscape, like an exquisite (or inappropriate) garment on the human body.*" In fact, the cultural landscape is the environment that surrounds us, changed by our activities under the influence of the available natural conditions, of our historical past, based on religious and ethnic views and the resulting specific culture. The architecture we have created that is different from

that in other cultural landscapes. From our way and means of life, which is different for different geographical areas even within a country.

So what is the relationship between heritage and cultural landscape? The "substrate" is one and the same – created by man and his culture and formed with the assistance of the surrounding natural environment. Heritage, however, is what binds us to a given territory: our past, our way of life, our feelings and thoughts. Heritage is what we have inherited. It belonged to our ancestors, it was received by us, but with a clear commitment to pass it on to the next generations. It is intimate both for us and for the territorial community to which we belong. And the cultural landscape is simply granted. It would provoke certain feelings, thoughts, memories, identification, but for another part of the population, not for us! This means that personally and as part of the concept of cultural geography heritage is a cultural landscape 'charged' with our emotions. These are two sides of the same coin. For a tourist, the visit to Notre Dame will be part of the typical cultural landscape, but for a local resident of the capital, it is part of their cultural heritage.

Identity.

There are different definitions of identity depending on the needs of the particular study. Rakadzhyska (2017) analyzes and summarizes a large part of them as Tsaneva (2015), Petrova (2017), Erikson (1996), Tashler (1981), Silgidzhiyan (1998), (cited in: Petkov, Penerliev, 2019). According these authors, identity is created by the interaction between an individual and a social environment with the outstanding role of culture and history for the identity process. The different dimensions of identity imply the sense of unity of the various states of the individual, but also a sense of belonging to a given community. "Identity" is a concept that is very difficult to define. The reason lies in the multifacetedness and breadth of the content that is summed up in this concept. The word "identity" comes from the Latin pronoun "*idem*" (the same) and subsequently the noun "*identitas*", meaning sameness, similarity, resemblance. Through their identity, people define themselves and differentiate themselves from others. With this

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specificity, the concept of "identity" contains generalizing characteristics, affording description of both the personal concept "about" and the manifestation of individuality, as well as the processes of group unification based on some similarity.

Urban identity.

The individual and the specific aspect is look for in the identity of urban areas. From the point of view of cultural geography, this is important in order to highlight peculiarities and differences. The identity of the urban landscape leads to the unification of the people of a given region and their differentiation from others (Kruit et al., 2004). Based on the review of definitions of different scientific disciplines, urban landscape identity is defined as (Keshtkaran, 2019) "*perceived uniqueness of a place*". Many authors discuss a number of possessive names for urban identity: "*identity of a place*", "*specificity of a place*", "*image of a place*", "*perception of a place*" and "*spirituality of place*", all of which refer to urban identity as the concept for "distinction". What all these definitions have in common is the ability to distinguish one place from another.

According to Cheshmehzangi (2015), urban identity has the following elements:

✚ singularity (one of a kind, unique) – related to both the physical environment (buildings, natural landscape) and intangible "values" (history, religion, etc.).

✚ functionality – a specific distinction of a given city (accessibility, or difficult to access, e.g. Machu Picchu)

✚ economic appearance – mostly associated with global cities as financial centers.

✚ perception – most often an emotional, subjective idea of a given place, a "benchmark", a distinguishing mark by which we personally distinguish one place from another (for some Britain is football, for others it is a "pub").

✚ geographical features – based on specific natural or topographical features of a city or place that make it different from others.

✚ historical outlook – this is the additional "level", an element of the given place, which ultimately makes it unique and different from others and is a major possible resource for tourism in the "place".

Here, we naturally find a direct connection between the socio-cultural and historical heritage of the city and its identity. They are interdependent and subordinate to each other.

DISidentification.

According to Penkova (2008), many cities are becoming similar, which is defined by specialists as "serial reproduction". This means that when a formula for economic urban development is successful in one location, so this concept spreads to other locations. The main reason, in our opinion, is the processes of urbanization. Cities had their own physiognomy (image). Today, this image and existence have disappeared and they have all become similar, homogeneous, and visually similar. In this regard, critics such as Mumford (1961) states that modern urbanism lacks individuality in terms of spatial, physical and social characteristics. In addition, he believes that the main problem of modern urbanization is urban identity. He says that cities in the past had a visual identity and by progressively more complex forms created conditions for a diverse social life for the societies, but at the expense of local identity. We put to the fore this publication because of its year of release – 1961. The transition into post-industrial society around this time was a major "driver" for the "unification" that followed.

While the city is a living space, it is in constant attempt to cope and adapt, to serve people's needs and development. This imposes multiple temporary identities on the city, which in many cases leads to the distortion or loss of their original inclusive identity. Let's remember the socialist period in Eastern Europe and the widespread construction of neighborhoods of concrete panel buildings. Often on a unique local cultural landscape. This clearly shows that urban environment and identity is a dynamic temporal category.

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This trend is not only in Eastern Europe. According to Mansour (2015), modern Arab cities live under great urban pressure and in conditions of constant loss of many of their civilization-specific and cultural assets. Many defects can occur in the time-space structure of the city, and the "distorted" situation becomes predominant. This pushes them towards greater deformation and loss of their aesthetic and historical values. This phenomenon has already been described by Penerliev, Petkov (2021), characterizing the distinctive features of Islamic civilization. Striving to catch up with the development of the rich, progressive Western civilization, a number of Asian cities have "copied" and developed the urbanizing "Western" urban landscape in their cities. Let's imagine Dubai with its architectural "miracles" built by international (western) designers, but with too little integration of the local Islamic identity.

A dangerous phenomenon described again by Mansour (2015) is the loss of connection with our past (not only with the typical local urban landscape). He claims that "*the loss of identity in the young Arab generations is clearly visible... as the dream of a young Arab is to get away from his city and its surroundings and orient himself towards the West*". A viewpoint applicable not only to the East. This confirms our thesis about the similarity of the concepts "past" and "cultural landscape". When the young generations lose their emotional connection with the "place", the "past" and their roots, the "replacement" of the urban landscape is only a matter of time. This, in turn, raises a number of questions about its preservation and its exceptional role for the development of, for example, urban tourism (or the threat to its development)!

Restoration of identity.

Here we mark little-explored territory in urban areas, which are related to processes of identity restoration. In modern times, the most common examples come from Eastern Europe or the old American Indian settlements. The periods of socialism and post-socialism led to the unification of the urban environment, and with it the marginalization of local urban, religious and ethnic communities. In the Balkans, in the period of ethnic confrontation, today we have clearly defined "divisive lines" in the cities on religious

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grounds. In the literature, the most common example is the city of Kosovska Mitrovica (Troch, Janssens, 2018). Today, the Iber Bridge territorially divides it into North and South Kosovska Mitrovica. In one part, Christian temples are intensively built, and in the other, Muslim ones. The rapid change in the urban landscape is an expression of a strong expression of identity, concealed and banned in the preceding decades. Such is the case with the city of Sarajevo, today's capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Local new urban "reconstructions" of the identity are observed in the small, ethnically cohesive communities in the large cities. These are the "Little China" neighborhoods formed in major American cities, the Muslim and African neighborhoods in France and Germany, etc. All of them have the typical cultural landscape "imported" from the respective countries. In cultural geography, this process is explained by the term "cultural diffusion".

The "imagined (imaginative) geographies" - terminological explanations

Regarding the concept of "imagined geographies", some clarification should be made both for the concept of "image" and that of "imagined geographies". This subject has been studied in a number of publications mostly by Russian authors (Zamyatin, 2013, Mitin, 2013, Kalutzkov, 2016, etc.).

The image. This is the most distant and indirect representation of reality (Zamyatin, 2013). The image is dynamic, often changing with a change of the reality itself. Typically it is strictly individual, rethought through the personal prism of one's perceptions.

When this image is "stitched" to a particular geographic space, we are talking about imagined geographies. Methodological prerequisites for studying the imagined geographies emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. That coincided with the establishment of the horological concept in geography, and was most evident in the works of the German geographer Karl Ritter.

The geographic image. It is a system of signs, symbols, stereotypes and myths that characterize a given territory. The study of space in cultural geography takes place on different hierarchical levels: psychological, conscious, subconscious, etc. On the

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subconscious level, modern studies exist in various Russian publications related to the so-called "imagined geographies" or "geographic images". In general, the term refers to the personal subconscious ideas which people have about particular geographic spaces. For example, with regard to alcoholic beverages, behind the geographic space of Southern Europe, we subconsciously imagine different wines and cocktails, and behind that of Northern Europe - mainly spirits (vodka, etc.). When culinary specialties are concerned, we subconsciously tend to think about pasta and pizza when thinking of Italy, or goulash in the case of Hungary, etc. These are the images by which we identify a particular geographic space or touristic area. Those images are real because they are a fact and are formed as a result of the cultural and historical identity of the nations (Penerliev, 2018).

Both the image as a category and the geographic image are dynamic, variable in time and under the influence of various factors (political, humanitarian, mass catastrophes and other unfavourable phenomena, etc.). The geographic image of Saint Martin Island in the Caribbean is that of a paradise as far as the tourism business is concerned. After Hurricane "Irma" in early September 2017, however, for most tourists their subconscious geographic image of that same place will be related to disaster, destruction and scare. The geographic image, according to Zamyatin, cannot be sustainable over time - an important finding regarding the tourism industry.

The image of the city.

One of the first publications dealing with the subject of the city image is the book by K. Lynch (1960): "The Image of the City"⁶. He clarified that the image of the city is the people's perception of the elements in the built environment and the way that they adapt and interact with the city by creating mental maps based on five elements; Paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmark (Mansour, 2015).

⁶ Lynch, K. 1960. *The image of city*, M.I.T. press, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Image formation and processing is a mental and utterly subjective process of forming our impressions of the urban landscape. It (the image) is stored in the memories of visitors and is individual for everyone. In contrast, identity represents the real situation of something and cannot vary subjectively like the image of the city. This is because it is based on the actual features of the urban landscape and is not based on a personal impression. This is the essential difference between the two concepts when the socio-cultural elements of the city are analyzed.

An ancient Egyptian hieroglyph shows the word "city" as an illustration: a circle and a cross. This symbol means an interrelation between protection and central location (Jasz, 2018). In modern development, the subjective image of the city can be both a physical and a mental element of its formation. So, e.g. in the city of Bilbao, the Guggenheim Museum is an emblematic building not only on local but also on global scale. The iconic buildings of the world-renowned architect Frank Gehry give an outlook to the cities. The tourists want to see the building, not so much the expositions in it. Similar is the example of Park Güell in Barcelona. *How does it affect the development of the city?*

The negative element in the thus constructed image of the city is the marginalization of other regions, buildings or local features of the urban landscape. This distorts to some extent the real image of the city, at the expense of the emphasis on certain "miracle" (architectural, infrastructural, religious, etc.). A negative element is "directing" crowds in certain time and space vectors to a specific object (on the basis of a previously formed "image", which burdens the infrastructure, strengthens the process of urbanization and the access to the respective object). As an example, we give the Acropolis in Athens, which is a long-established "image" of Greece. Unknowingly, tourists exchange slogans: *"You haven't been to Greece if you haven't visited the Acropolis!"*

From the standpoint of tourism science, "the image of the tourist place" is directly related to the so-called "image" of the destination. They are two sides of the same coin. The richer the image of the city, the more prestigious the image. Therefore, the focus should be on the overall accentuation and formation of the "image", not only prioritizing individual elements, regions and buildings in the city.

Connection with cultural and urban tourism.

In the modern structure of the tourism sector, urban tourism occupies an increasingly high share. Its growth is tangible in both developed and developing economies. The distribution of city breaks is 21% in Europe, 17% in North America, 25% in Asia Pacific and 22% in Latin America (Postma, Buda, Cugerell, 2017). A more recent study (Batista e Silva et al., 2020) shows that nearly 20% of overnight stays in EU countries are in large cities, and the average stay is 5.3 nights. Something more: a study on 73 leading cities with developed urban tourism found that (<https://wtcc.org/Research/Economic-Impact/Cities>):

- ✚ travel and tourism in these 73 cities directly accounts for 4.4% of the city's GDP (\$691 billion as of 2018);

- ✚ 17 million jobs are offered (5.7% of the total employment in these cities in 2018);

- ✚ the money spent by international visitors is more important for the cities than it usually is for the countries as a whole. International visitors accounted for 45% of tourism spending in the 73 cities in that same year.

The importance of urban tourism to both the tourism sector and urban economies is undeniably paramount.

An array of studies (Tracz, Bajgier-Kowalska, 2019, etc.) have confirmed the thesis that urban tourism is the main motive for visiting cultural and historical sites. Even a single business trip is associated with a visit to such sites. A study by the cited authors shows that in the cities of Budapest, Prague and Warsaw the largest share belongs to the visits to the historical sites (65% for Budapest, 70% for Prague and 30% for Warsaw). Foreign visitors also focus on visits to galleries, museums and architectural sites (a share over 80% regarding foreign tourists visiting Prague).

This explicitly indicates that cultural-historical heritage and identity of urban areas are the categories that are to be primarily explored as an important element/resource for urban tourism.

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Conclusions.

The exposition so far suggests that a large city is a kaleidoscope of historical conditions and interrelationships. The basic categories clarified herein are dynamic over time, depending on historical development, political processes, demographic development and migrations. These categories describe the city not so much as a geographical physical entity, but more as a cultural space with its own "physiognomy", character, rhythm of life and local communities. Taking in consideration them gives a new outlook to the city and strongly fosters the elucidation of the processes of formation and development of the city and its future.

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Submetido em 15/09/2022

Avaliado em: 05/08/2022