

COMPARING HABITATS

A geography of dispersed urbanization. Reading the lines of the *parcellaire*

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Abstract

In a two-period exercise of comparison – the synchronic regional and the diachronic local comparisons –, the article aims at describing typo-morphological construction and modification of the *parcellaire*, defined as the system of land property division, regulating the territorialisation of our societies. *Parcellaire* is about lines and limits of the constitutive territory's elements and their relations, it is about giving space for human being and organizing it as a shared asset. The *parcellaire*, seen as the common element of these dispersed landscape, everywhere present and complexly interweaving rural and agrarian patterns of cultivated fields with elements of the contemporary city, unfold new reading of what was once called a *Banlieue Radieuse*, through the construction of a lexicon of forms. The transformations, line by line, of these geographies, tell us about the fine construction of a territory of dispersed habitat and the future of the very same.

Keywords: limits, *parcellaire*, land division, palimpsest, re-edition, city-territory, dispersionA context of dispersion

In the contemporary city, today's dispersed urbanization and fragmentary spatial conditions are the result of a long-term process of construction of the territory[1-3]. Constant relations between humans and nature have built artefacts organizing the space inside which we live and move. Within this structure, the acute, repeated and iterative modifications, divisions or merging of plots are agents at work in the constitution of a *fond territorial*, a palimpsest (note a), which profoundly impacts the construction of this layered and intermeshed territory. In the evolution of this palimpsest, the *parcellaire* is a determining element, as a lineal substrate for land and soils, welcoming further artefactual constructions, urban materials, agricultural elements, drawing landscapes. We can read the form of several territorialisms in the accumulation of these traces, since they are the spatialization of uses, movement, appropriation and ecological or societal organization human groups have founded on the territory in relation to other groups or materials.

Modernism, capitalism and the industrial age have been standardizing the tools and rules meant to organize, distribute, protect, give access and appropriate both land and territories. Those land management and planning tools, which we will name in a global yet simplistic word as *zonage*, are conceptually built under the assumption of functionalism and property rights and - and in line with the fundamentals of modernism - under the idea of *tabula rasa*. Therefore, these tools were not initially much applied in tracing out the geomorphological shape of the territory and the history-based reading of the land [4]. Nevertheless, through the school of French historians and geographers such as Demangeon, Bloch, Febvre or de la Blache and Italian or Swiss architects such as Muratori, Rossi, Gregotti and Bernoulli, questions of territorial form have been reclaimed in the debate on its transformation and continue to be reclaimed by archaeologists, planners, landscapers and other disciplinary fields today. Emerging from this tradition, spatial and temporal concepts such as agglomeration and dispersion as well as permanence,