Reviews

Dominique Perrault – Michal Bogár – Ľubomír Králik – Ľudovít Urban (eds.): Bratislava Metropolis

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The bilingual Slovak-French publication „Bratislava Metropolis" is a result of close collaboration of two architectural studios (Dominique Perraut architecture and Bogár Králik Urban) and a number of invited external experts. It is a multidisciplinary contribution about changes of the Slovak capital and the potential of the city „to be or not to be" a real metropolis. Authors of particular chapters are experts from different disciplinary fields who look at the city in historical, architectural, urbanistic, ethnological, sociological and philosophical contexts. Despite the fact that the publication focuses on Bratislava only, it may be inspiring for experts studying any metropolis in European, but particularly Central European region.

When using the term metropolis, we can start with the definition used by historian Žofia Lysá in the chapter „The city on the periphery, but in the centre of action": Originally, in ancient Greece, the term metropolis meant the name of the centre in relation to the colony. Later, in ancient Rome, it was the capital city of the province. In medieval Hungary, the term was used for naming the seat of the archbishop. In the modern Slovak language, metropolis means the centre of the region or the state, and it is often used as a synonymum for the capital city of any centre (centre of commerce, fashion, culture, music)... In contemporary understanding, metropolis is part of a larger urban area often called a metropolitan region or a metropolitan society. (Lysá, p. 8)

In two introductory chapters of the publication, Dominique Perraut discusses differences between the historical city that is continuously built and has clear borders, and the metropolis that is characterised by openness, fragmentation and discontinuity. The key object of his analysis is the notion of „emptiness". In the metropolis, emptiness or vacancy (open vacant places that include interspace and periphery with natural and agricultural areas) alternates with built areas. Perrault sees emptiness as a substance, not an absence. A vacant space in his understanding means neither a dead or neglected space nor a space that needs to be built. According to him: „To settle, occupy or remake the city does not necessarily mean to build it or to identify its exact meaning. It would be possible to build places without any specific purpose as used to be market places, places for nomads without permanent home, mobile facilities or shelters that were habitable, easy to build, rebuild and move. The specific feature of a vacant space is the fact that it covers endless possibilities". (Parrault, p. 28) Perrault provocatively opens questions about contemporary practices in postsocialist Central European metropoles in which developers look for any vacant space that could be built. At the same time, Perrault might either inspire or provoke us by his comments that „emptiness" can be used as a place for the people without a permanent address, a mobile shelter and a temporary home – and these were words written before the refugee crisis...

Perrault´s introductory chapters are followed by papers dealing with the city of Bratislava. Architects Michal Bogár, Ľubomír Králik and Ľudovít Urban (authors and

editors) focus on the category of interspace. They describe it using an anthropological term „rites de passage". In their understanding, all these „passages" originate from the natural geographical border of the Danube river that has influenced the history: in all historic periods it either connected or disconnected various cultures and states. And each inhabitant of Bratislava has experienced these rites de passage differently – according to the historic period s/he lived in, and to the permeability of the border of the passage. The metropolitan feature of Bratislava was often described with the metaphor of a gate – an important city on the border. During the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy the city was the „Hungarian gate" (porta hungarica), after the establishment of the first Czechoslovak Republic it was the „Bratislava gate" – a gate to the world, to international contacts and relations. (Bogár – Králik – Urban, p. 36)

However, if we take only the size as a criterion for a metropolis (in the 19th century it was over 100 000 inhabitants, at present is is over 1 million inhabitants), Bratislava was always comparable only with provincial Austrian-Hungarian cities such as Graz, Brno, Zagreb and others, but in a broader perspective it was (and it again has become) part of a large metropolitan area that connect Vienna, Bratislava, Győr and other cities, towns and villages in the region. In this context, the potential of an „untouched" interspace in Bratislava (a vacant space freely passing from a strictly controlled area of the former Iron Curtain with numerous natural fields to the territory of the neighbouring country – Austria) presents an interesting challenge for urban experts planning urbanisation of this space. The authors of this chapter emphasise the importance to keep and protect the „emptiness" of some localities in the metropolitan interspace with the aim to know, understand and heal this territory. They define this process as „urbi-puncture". (p. 50)

Vladimír Šimkovič in the chapter „Position and fate of the city on the border" addresses the problem of phenomenology of space – the relation between the man and surrounding environment (objective – rational and subjective – emotional). Šimkovič looks at Bratislava through various geographical and historical images, categories and narratives such as: The Danube; the beginning of the settlement; the Celts, the Romans, the Germans and the river as a permeable border; the Germans, the Avars, the Slavs – the civilisation borders; the medieval city; the Baroque city; the capitalist city; the socialist city; and a new beginning (where we are and what to do). According to Šimkovič, Bratislava reached its peak in the Baroque period when it experienced the glory of a German speaking capital of the Hungarian Monarchy and of a leisure place for the imperial Vienna. Šimkovič asks how to change our way of thinking towards better understanding of meanings of space that goes beyond technocratic approaches and leads to more philosophical thinking.

The following chapters bring reflections about Bratislava as a (possible) metropolis from the perspective of experts in social sciences and humanities. The historian Žofia Lysá maps historic intersections of the development of the city since its beginnings in the 9th century until the present. She emphasises various aspects of the city in the context of significant contacts, mostly historic ones (connections between Bratislava and Vienna, Budapest, Brno, Sopron, Trnava and other cities) and regional ones (close relation between Bratislava and neighbouring rural, mainly wine-producing towns and villages that were an important source of finances as well as identity for the city). The

ethnologist Peter Salner has been studying diverse cultures and groups living in Bratislava. He describes changes in social structure and subsequently changes in relations between diverse groups in different historic periods. He strengthens, but also challenges the image of Bratislava as a metropolis: is it the smallest metropolis or the largest village?

The sociologist Ľubomír Falťan thinks of Bratislava as a metropolis on three borders. He starts with the meaning of metropolis and its main features that are summarised in four categories: The size; specific services and institutions; the potential of innovation in technical sphere and other spheres; the uniqueness and specificity of the place. He emphasises the importance of the position of the city in transnational urban networks with high concentration of power and control. Is Bratislava a city that can be defined as a metropolis? Historically, until the period of the World War II Bratislava was an important multiethnic and transnational city. After the 1948 Czechoslovak coup d'état (known as „February 1948" and in Communist historiography as "Victorious February"), Bratislava became more a regional centre situated on the borders of three countries. Ľubomír Falťan looks at the city through the features of a metropolis and the specificities of Bratislava, such as cross-border suburbanisation. He notes that Bratislava has a full potential to become part of the Central European metropolitan region (Vienna – Bratislava – Brno – Győr – Budapest). The question is how these opportunities will be used.

Zoja Droppová and Zuzana Hudeková study the city in a very broad regional, landscape and cultural contexts. They are interested in most significant cultural routes, localities of cultural and natural heritage in the neighbourhoods of Bratislava and their use in tourism. Their chapters are followed by interviews with Dominque Perrault – an inspiring reading for everyone who is interested in the development of contemporary cities. The final contribution written by the Slovak philosopher Miroslav Marcelli brings theoretical reflections on the city and its relation to place, time and rhythm. Marcelli builds on concepts developed by famous thinkers, scientists and urban planners (such as Arendt, Rossiaud, Barthes, Foucault, Lefebvre or Le Corbusier). He himself proposes new ideas about the changes in contemporary cities and their role in contemporary societies.

The publication Bratislava Metropolis is a unique collection of diverse views of the city generally and the city of Bratislava particularly. The variety of opinions and perspectives of a number of experts from different disciplines and refreshing contributions of the French architect Dominique Perrault make the book „readable" not only for scientists, but also for a broader public. They offer motivations and inspirations for everyone who participates in „making the city" – whether it is an architect, urban planner, sociologist, ethnologist or a civil activist.

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