

# УНИКАЛЬНОЕ И ВСЕОБЩЕЕ ПРОСТРАНСТВО ГОРОДА

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Ремм Т.

## ГЕТЕРОТОПИЯ В ВОЗНИКАЮЩИХ ТОЧКАХ ЛОКАЛЬНОГО ГОРОДСКОГО ТЕКСТА<sup>©</sup>

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*Аннотация.* Город включает в себя множество семиотических отношений и процессов на разных уровнях и различными агентами. Городское пространство значимо через его связь с культурными моделями и способами жизни. В отличие от силы диверсификации за счет разнообразия субъектов, действий и интерпретаций, градостроительный дискурс и практика имеют тенденцию предписывать единый смысл. Само планирование – это согласование общественных идеалов, концептуально-текстуальное развитие утопии. Во-первых, ограниченное применение новых представлений в городском пространстве может стать временной гетеротопией из-за ограниченной и не полностью интегрированной реализации утопических представлений. Анализ последних градостроительных процессов в Тарту, Эстония, показывает тенденцию к унификации, что приводит к последовательной текстуализации города на основе единой централизованной модели города, примером которой является монументализирующая реконструкция Центрального моста с его гетеротопическим аспектом.

*Ключевые слова:* семиотика пространства; гетеротопия; городской текст; Тарту.

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**Heterotopia in emergent spots of local city text**

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*Abstract.* The city involves a variety of semiotic relations and processes at different levels and by various agents. Urban space is significant through its relations with cultural models and ways of living. In contrast to the force of diversification by the variety of subjects, actions and interpretations, urban planning discourse and practices tend to prescribe a unified meaning. Planning itself is a negotiation of societal ideals, conceptual-textual development of utopia. The first limited applications of new visions in urban space can become temporary heterotopia due to being limited and not fully integrated realizations of utopian visions. The analysis of recent urban planning processes in Tartu, Estonia, shows a trend towards unification resulting in coherent textualization of the city on the basis of a unitary centralized city-model that is exemplified in a monumentalizing redesign of a central bridge with its heterotopic aspect

Keywords: semiotics of space; heterotopia; city text; Tartu.

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The essence of the city has been found to be in a large variety of practices, of subjects and interpretations – the city is a dialogic meeting point, a place of sociocultural heterogeneity. Lewis Mumford [1970: 480] has thus explained the city as «a related collection of primary groups and purposive associations», an intensified «drama» of various social groups. In cultural semiotic terms, Juri Lotman explains the city as a *culture generator* and a *melting-pot of languages, texts and codes*:

The city is a complex semiotic mechanism, a culture-generator, but it carries out this function only because it is a melting-pot of texts and codes, belonging to all kinds of languages and levels. The essential semiotic polyglottism of every city is what makes it so productive of semiotic encounters. The city, being the place where different national, social and stylistic codes and texts confront each other, is the place of hybridization, recordings, semiotic translations, all of which makes it into a powerful generator of new information [Lotman, 1990, p. 194].

In contrast to this variety there are also forces ordering and simplifying meaning making in the city – for example, common practices, negotiations on and conventionalisation of the social reality, shared physical environment and institutionalisation of meaning patterns. The city as a sociocultural phenomenon can be defined as characteristically based first on social diversity that, besides a variety of roles and role

expectations, involves, to a remarkable degree, impersonal and voluntary relations and interactions. Second, it is a part and an expression of the cultural worldview (including values, norms, and knowledge) of the society. Third, positioning these two in relation to the urban space, the city as a living environment of human community and other species is a condition and manifestation of these encounters and models.

In the most general sense, the meaning of a built environment is to be found in a particular way of living. But it is not a direct correspondence. The meaning, the way of living is rather a more general code – it is ‘the culturally coded use’ [Eco, 1968] or even a model of the world. Underlying basic level of meaningfulness of spatial environment depends on organism’s distinction making abilities and actions enabled by the environment. This proxemic interaction partiality involves organism’s relation to its environment as well as the design and affordances of these things themselves. Thus, it concerns directly the very basis of spatial sociocultural phenomena. The level of cultural coding of space involves choice and organisation of features and potential uses of the environment as well as organisation into wider patterns. At the social level, it is the spatial dimension of interaction situations; at the cultural connotative level, it is the semantic coding of space according to the respective world image and models of settlement space [Lagopoulos, 1983]. One might try to reach more local interpretations on the basis of these cultural models of settlement space but reconstructing the meanings of a place calls instead for a shift of levels and interrelating cultural models to interactions in place. In the sections to follow I discuss heterotopia as a case of such realisation of cultural models at the local level.

## **Heterotopia**

For Michel Foucault, space is significant by being in correspondence with culture in general – with the worldview and mundane practices. But he also looks further, searching for culturally significant places. He points out two types of these special spaces, utopias and heterotopias.

But among all these sites, I am interested in certain ones that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites,

but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect [Foucault, 1986, p. 24].

Utopias are unreal spaces, inverted analogies of the space of the particular society with no real place, *heterotopias* in contrast are real: «something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted» [Foucault, 1986, p. 24]. While heterotopia should be real and significant, at a closer look its meanings dissolve into the variety of interpretations. The essence of such places is not to be found in physical space but in its relation to the semiotic space of the culture.

According to Foucault, heterotopy has a curious characteristic – in relation to the whole cultural system, it is in a representational function (or at least active semiotic function). In relation to the general surrounding urban space as meaningful environment due to living activity, heterotopy is a model. This double existence makes it interesting. In the semiotics of space we can distinguish two broad lines of research. One, let it be semiotics of landscape, asks about interpretations of spatial environment, thus physical space as a vehicle of a sign system. The other one asks about spatiality of semiosis and semiotic space. What Foucault describes as heterotopy, mainly belongs to cultural landscape – realisation of utopia in physical and everyday space. This explains why the concept has been popular among human geographers and why Foucault is considered to be a grounding author for the so-called spatial turn and to be a geography related author.

At the same time, heterotopy is a phenomenon at the sociocultural level – and not individual-cognitive. It relates directly to the issues of semiotic space. Heterotopia exists only in relation to a wider system, it is a relation between cultural landscape (semiotised spatial environment in the geographical sense) and the semiotic space of culture. It is an element that represents and reflects, but as it forms a new whole, it represents and reflects in a distorted way. It is a piece of practical landscape that is at the same time a model and a whole.

### Textualities of the city

How does heterotopia relate to the wider system, to culture? From the cultural semiotics perspective, this can be explained by focus-

ing on the textualisation processes involved in the *text of a city* taken not as an aggregation of cultural representations of the city, but as a formation of the *code-text* of the local culture. The topic of urban textuality involves three levels [see also Remm, 2016].

(1) Articulation of the meaningful environment as perceptual and action-related space; architectural and other objects function here as more concrete texts in the city.

(2) The city as a *cultural text*, manifestation of cultural models and ideologies in the city.

(3) Constructing a total textual reality, city-text in culture and the city as a code-text for the local culture (a study of culture and society and respective semiosis).

From the perspective of Tartu-Moscow school of cultural semiotics, culture appears as a conglomeration of texts, languages and their relations; the city, as any other cultural phenomena, exists in culture in the form of texts and as a city-text in culture – combining the physical environment, behaviour, literary and pictorial representations [see for example [Лотман, 1984; Минц, Безродный, Данилевский, 1984; Топоров, 2003]. It should be noted that *culture* remains rather abstract in this approach and can be specified to refer to a collection of texts. But it can also be approached as a more-or-less shared world of an interacting population, for example, at a national or local level. As a sociocultural phenomenon, the city has its community and local culture. Therefore, the text of the city is not only about the interpretation of the urban space or mythology about a city, but about the manifestation of the (local) culture, its self-description, social structure and practices in material, as well as mental spatial forms. The city is an expression of culture, a cultural text is a manifestation of the culture, realisation of its world image and self-model. The text of the city in the local culture is to be considered the code-text of that local culture. As a code-text it organises not only representations but at least as importantly the identity formation, social relations and processes, and meaningful everyday practices. Different dimensions of this text can be more or less integrated and can have a strong empowering effect by combining material forms with identity, historical narratives and representations – and leading to the symbolic reality of the local community.

## Urban planning and making of a code-text

A mode of re-making this code-text is urban planning. Urban planning (particularly in its contemporary participative mode) is a collective dialogic creation of a self-descriptive model targeted at a future state of the society, culture and environment. In planning we can find both, the world model of the society (or *cultural model* in terms of Lotman) in its ideal mode (an utopia) and the society-specific type of semiosis – procedures both in terms of concrete interactional communicative processes as well as normative ways of interpretation – how to negotiate common ideals and apply them.

Lotman makes a distinction between three tendencies in the self-modelling of culture:

1. Creation of culture's self-models aiming for utmost nearness to the actually existing culture.
2. Creation of cultural self-models distinguished from cultural practice and targeted at changing the practice. [...]
3. Self-models, culture's ideal self-consciousness, existing and functioning separately from it and not meant to approach it [Лотман, 2000, p. 420].

Urban planning typically involves a technical description of the current reality (material reality in terms relevant to the present sociocultural situation, for example, the more recent emphasis on mapping bicycle traffic and pollution) and a model of foreseen changes. The latter is based on some ideal vision of the future – which can be more or less utopic. Materialising these ideals in limited spots of material urban space can therefore create heterotopic places – realisations of utopia (local cultural ideals) at least as long as the place steps out as a special structure in the background of the wider urban space and sociocultural reality. In this sense an innovation in the urban space has some heterotopian character as a realisation of a utopia or models that are targeted toward a non-existing future state.

## The urban code-text of Tartu

The case of Tartu serves here as an example of manifestation of cultural models in urban planning and of respective heterotopia in tangible urban space itself. Tartu is the second largest city in Estonia with

the population of ca 100 000. Following the cultural models positioning the city in the cultural space either at the edge and oriented toward outside of the cultural space or being seen as central and oriented to the inside of the culture [ЛЮТМАН, 1984], Tartu has been related to the latter, concentric model of the city [cf. Magnus, Remm, 2018; Velsker, Soovik, 2017; for a conceptualization from 1637 see e.g. Risingh, 2009]; it also served as an isomorphic type of the centre for Estonian national identity formation during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries [see e.g. Kruus, 1920].

The text of Tartu itself can be looked for in Estonian literature [Velsker, Soovik, 2017] but also in contemporary sociocultural processes as urban planning, branding and even administrative governance [Remm, 2018]. As a result, a rather coherent *code-text* as a dominant structuring model is provided. It has its relation to the society but in a transformed way and can well be considered a utopian vision of the city, its culture, society and space. The code-text of Tartu is characterised by mutually enforcing traits like a closed and centrally oriented urban model, identity of an (intellectually and ecologically oriented) urban community, active (egalitarian) public space.

Such a model provides a rather coherent idea of the city and as it is manifested in different fields, by different sign systems, it forms a strong and clear text of the city. Besides various representations, these utopian visions related to local identity can also be realised in the actual urban space. Realising a utopian vision of the city and cultural models of the community, such urban places acquire traits of heterotopia. Planning is not a true representation of reality but rather a design of an ideal (spatial, societal and cultural ideal). It has its applications in re-designs of practical urban spaces – but as declarative objects. These are objects that function as *as if realisations* of idealistic models. Thus, we can find places that at least for some time are counter-organised to the logic of the surroundings. Their relations to the rest of the urban space are not based on previous ways of living and are not in this sense «real», but instead, are mediated through the model that is utopic.

### **Arch bridge in Tartu as a (temporary) heterotopia in Tartu**

In the very centre of the city there is a pedestrian bridge over the river Emajõgi in Tartu. The current bridge was built 1957–1959 in

place of the former Stone bridge bombed in 1941 and commemorated by a bronze model next to the current bridge. While the memory of the Stone bridge has functioned as a key element in the historical, «Golden age» narrative of Tartu identity, the Arch bridge has been an anchor for the narrative of the modern student town – with the tradition of illegal walking over the arch. In 2017 the bridge was reconstructed: two pedestrian passages widened (from 2 to 3 meters, which is a significant difference for proxemics of interpersonal distances), temporary exhibition facilities between the columns substituted with ones on the rails, a passage by the river added under the bridge and both ends of the bridge turned into small urban squares. The square on the opposite bank to the Town hall square is dedicated to the national awakening in 19<sup>th</sup> century and has sculptures of two key figures, Lydia Koidula and Johan Voldemar Jannsen, designed and arranged to support (playful) engagement with the sculptures and surrounding space.



Figure 1.

**Arch bridge in Tartu and the open public space at its left-bank end with sculptures and other elements of interactive design (photo 10.10.2018 by author)**

Interpreted in terms of action space, the bridge is a spatial structure enabling the movement over the river, encounters and limited interactions. While the practical use of the bridge for crossing the river is still dominant, it is complemented with new qualities and potentials. In these terms, the changes provide a new trajectory under the bridge but most of all loosen the orientation to linear movement, suggest and enable variability of interactions and observation of the exhibition, surroundings and people. These new qualities have performatively been enacted also during ceremonial events like the opening of the reconstructed bridge and opening of the sculptures<sup>1</sup>.

In the wider context, this change can be seen as part of an aim of activating the urban centre and supporting participative urban culture in Tartu. As a result of the changes there is also a transformation in the symbolic modality of the bridge. Formerly the two semiotic dimensions, functional and symbolic use of the bridge remained relatively separate (only to be combined in the liminal ritual of crossing over the arch). The reconstruction turned the functional-symbolic object into a holistic participative monument. A space was created that is functionally more open, interactional and monumentalising by directing to reflective observation.

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To conclude, the city consists of semiotic diversity. Certain modelling processes in culture can be targeted towards hegemonic interpretations. During urban planning, negotiations of values, visions and identities of the local community and their manifestations in urban space are part of these processes. The resulting cultural model is an urban code-text that can involve a utopian dimension. Manifesting these models in the design of urban space builds heterotopic places. These are emergent nodes of sociocultural system, that enrich the semiotic layers of the historically developing urban fabric and can become integrate with surrounding developments or remain heterotopic realisations of utopic sociocultural projects.

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<sup>1</sup> Mode of access: See respectively: <https://www.tartu.ee/et/kaarsilla-remont-sai-valmis> <https://www.tartu.ee/et/koidula-ja-jannseni-malestusvaljaku-avamine>

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