

Urban morphology

[Science](#), [Geography](#)



Urban morphology is the study of the form of human settlements and the process of their formation and transformation. The study seeks to understand the spatial structure and character of a metropolitan area, city, town or village by examining the patterns of its component parts and the process of its development. This can involve the analysis of physical structures at different scales as well as patterns of movement, land use, ownership or control and occupation. Typically, analysis of physical form focuses on street pattern, lot (or, in the UK, plot) pattern and building pattern, sometimes referred to collectively as urban grain. Analysis of specific settlements is usually undertaken using cartographic sources and the process of development is deduced from comparison of historic maps. Special attention is given to how the physical form of a city changes over time and to how different cities compare to each other. Another significant part of this subfield deals with the study of the social forms which are expressed in the physical layout of a city, and, conversely, how physical form produces or reproduces various social forms. The essence of the idea of morphology was initially expressed in the writings of the great poet and philosopher Goethe (1790); the term as such was first used in bioscience. Recently it is being increasingly used in geography, geology, philology and other subjects. In American geography, urban morphology as a particular field of study owes its origins to Lewis Mumford, James Vance and Sam Bass Warner. Peter Hall of the UK is also a central figure. Urban morphology is also considered as the study of urban tissue, or fabric, as a means of discerning the underlying structure of the built landscape. This approach challenges the common perception of unplanned environments as chaotic or

vaguely organic through understanding the structures and processes embedded in urbanisation.