

Food for thought

The city of the Middle Ages can be contrasted to an expanding village. In the city of the middle ages the street pattern often follows the contours of the landscape or the banks of a river, which narrow winding alleyways leading to a central marketplace. At the centre of the market square lies the church. The market square may have developed to a town square, with important buildings as a town or city hall and surrounded by the houses of rich merchants.

During the renaissance beginning in the late 1400's people began to look back in time to the cities of the ancient Greeks and Roman legions and begin to plan cities based on a grid system, where balance and harmony are important factors in the layout of the city. The golden mean and a proportional system are used for laying down the streetscape. This grid plan system is developed through the elegant street plans of the age of enlightenment. During the renaissance and baroque periods, the ideal is to harmonize with a human scale. This develops into monumental grid plans and expansive boulevards, esplanades, and avenues of the neo-classical cities of the late 1800's, where imperious armies could parade and the newly rich, middle classes could show off their fine clothes.

At the end of the 19th century the public life of the city expanded. At the same time there was a reaction to the ordered classical city. Romantic ideas linked to nationalism, nature, the arts, and craftsmanship made an appearance in the city plan. Technology began to appear; gas and electric lighting, tramways and the motor car changed our cities for ever. Newly planned suburbs created homes for the middle classes away from the slums of the inner city.

After the destruction of two world wars and the decay of disease and poverty –ridden cities the modernist city became the norm. Hi-rise centralised living surrounded by nature in satellite towns was the ideal. After an over exploitation of the ideal which led to disillusionment, people started to move back to the old city in waves of gentrification. The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st is encapsulated by an unprecedented urbanisation and centralisation. Throughout the world, small villages and towns are shrinking and our larger cities are growing, leading to new questions about how we can sustain this growth.

Instructions

Read the article and decide which century your house/block/street/local community is from! **Why?**

Article: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_urban_planning