Book Notes

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BOOK NOTES

Dense and green building typologies: research, policy and practice perspectives by *Thomas Schröpfer* and *Sacha Menz*, Springer, Singapore, 2019, 119 pp. ISBN 978–981–13–0712–6. This collection of essays emerged from research conducted by the 'Dense and green building typologies' team at the Future Cities Laboratory, a collaboration between ETH Zurich and Singapore University. The authors of the book, ranging from architects to ecologists, describe the challenges in Singapore of combining high density with good liveability – a problem central for many fast growing cities. The result is a rich overview of planning and design principles that have been proven to be effective in Singapore. New ways are introduced of describing and defining both green spaces and buildings: Chapter 5 describes green spaces as a network of nodes and connections, resulting in four connector types; Chapters 6 and 13 discuss new building types that go beyond the block and tower solutions, making buildings part of the green connector typology discussed in Chapter 5; Chapter 9 takes up the challenge of integrating water management as an integrative part of urban development where, again, the integrated approach results in new design methodologies and typologies. Although the book does not give a deep understanding of the issues and lacks theoretical embedding, it gives an interesting overview of urgent challenges in architecture and urban planning in which a deeper understanding of green areas in cities as ecological environments is central.

Gridded worlds: an urban anthology edited by *Reuben Rose-Redwood* and *Liora Bigon*, Springer, Cham, Switzerland, 2018, 293 pp. ISBN 978–3–319–76489–4. This is a showcase of the diversity of the grid plan and gives a rich overview of conventional and new interpretations of the grid. The book includes grids from all times and all places and so goes beyond the Eurocentric-colonialist narratives of the grid. In the introduction, the editors discuss the potential problem of emphasizing 'form' over 'process', which has led to a dominance of contributions that discuss gridding as a practice of spatial reproduction. They offer a critical analysis of the politico-economic and socio-cultural effects of gridding: and in a discussion of the origin of the grid in Chapters 2 and 3 the former takes the stand of the one-time-invention and the latter stems from the idea that cultural innovations can occur independently in multiple locations at the same time. In Chapter 4, by Spiro Kostof and based on his book *The city shaped*, the formal characteristics of the grid are discussed. Besides the common characteristics of the grid plan, he discusses the secondary grid of plots and the rise of the super-grid with major traffic arteries separating communities from each other. This interesting chapter for morphologists is an exception in this book, where the majority of contributions discuss the grid as a political instrument – from the grid as colonial imposition to a symbol of Confucian ideals and a spatial framework for socialist cities. The overarching conclusion is that the same gridded plan can serve very different economic and political goals.

The Venice variations: tracing the architectural imagination by *Sophia Psarra*, UCL Press, London, UK, 2018, 306 pp. ISBN 978–1–78735–241–4. Psarra uses the city of Venice as a case to explore architecture and cities as 'authorship' and 'creative potential'. Often expressed as dualities, they relate, according to her, to one question: 'what is the relation between architecture as the authored product of design, and cities and buildings as the authorless collaborative products of society?' In other words, the book is about the dichotomy between planned and unplanned cities, which Psarra proposes to replace with a combined theory of 'freedom and necessity' in architecture and design. What she means is that besides empirical, encyclopaedic and

analytical knowledge, a fourth type of knowledge is needed – that is knowledge of possibility, of variants consciously or unconsciously combined. The first two chapters discuss Venice as the authorless collaborative product (Chapter 1) and as authored product of design (Chapter 2). In Chapters 3 and 4, Venice is explored as an inspirational source for a work of literature (*Invisible cities* by Calvino) and architecture (Le Corbusier's Hospital building, designed for Venice). In the same chapters, she highlights parallels between these two works and the city of Venice, showing that they follow a similar generative logic. This exploration is supported with a rich series of analytical maps using network centrality and visibility analysis. The final chapter returns to the main question of the book – the dichotomy between intentional design and cities coming into being out of multiple actions over long periods of time.

Landscape as *forma mentis*. Interpreting the integral dimension of the anthropic space: Mongolia by *Nicola Scardigno*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, Italy, 2018, 207 pp. ISBN 978–88–917–6880–3. This is part of a series edited by Giuseppe Strappa entitled 'Reading and design'. The series concentrates on the processes of change relating to the current crisis in cities and territories. In this book Scardigno develops a method to (re)interpret the meaning of landscape, combining three perspectives: history, environment and culture. In relation to history, landscape is discussed as the product of the critical relation between man and the physical environment. The natural environment of landscape includes climate, geomorphology, hydrology and vegetation. Besides these dimensions, various complexity levels are introduced. These dimensions and complexity levels are then used to develop a tool of analysis for the reading of landscapes. This first part of the book is interesting, but very dense with many concepts introduced in only 50 pages. In the second part, covering the remaining 150 pages, the developed tool is tested in the territory of Mongolia. This part of the book is richly illustrated and well-documented, but in places is very specific. This is particularly evident because of the lack of a concluding chapter that generalizes the findings and relates back to the first part of the book.

The poverty of territorialism: a neo-Medieval view of Europe and European planning by *Andreas Faludi*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, UK, 2018, 179 pp. ISBN 978–1–78897–360–1. Here the question of territorialism or, more precisely the 'territorial trap', is centre stage. Faludi highlights a central problem with the representation of plans – self-contained territories seem to be suspended in empty space. In a networked world, this is problematic at every scale. Faludi uses territorial boundaries within Europe to exemplify this. The book is structured in five parts. In Part I, the author positions himself and gives the background to why he felt the need to write this book. In Part II, he problematizes territoriality and, in Part III, relates it to the European Union. The fourth part explores alternative paths, arguing for the unlearning of thinking about borders as dividers. Alternative metaphors are used to conceptualize European space. For example, the title of one of the chapters is 'The European archipelago': this should not be interpreted as countries as islands being isolated – on the contrary, it is argued that the water gives them superb connectivity. The last part brings the discussion back to urban planning, where Faludi argues that planning is the management of uncertainty and the planners' object should not be an area within fixed borders.

Housing estates in Europe: poverty, ethnic segregation and policy challenges edited by *Daniel Baldwin Hess, Tiit Tammaru* and *Maarten van Ham*, Springer Nature Switzerland, Cham, Switzerland 2018, 424 pp. ISBN 978–3–319–92812–8. In this anthology about housing estates in Europe, the status of housing estates and their physical condition and social status are assessed. The comparison of various national settings is especially interesting. In Part I, the editors synthesize empirical evidence about the changing status of large housing estates in Europe. In Part II, the extent to which physical form and/or competition with newer neighbourhoods are responsible for the eventual failure of housing estates is explored. In Part III, an impressive list of case studies is presented: Greece (Athens), Germany (Berlin), England (Birmingham), Belgium (Brussels), Romania (Bucharest), Hungary (Budapest), Finland

(Helsinki), Spain (Madrid), Italy (Milan), Russia (Moscow), France (Paris), Czechia (Prague), Sweden (Stockholm) and Estonia (Tallinn). The main findings of this extensive work are presented in the first chapter. An important conclusion is that large variations exist between countries, both in the initial conditions and contexts of housing estates and in their trajectories of change. Larger proportions of the population live in large housing estates in Eastern Europe, while in Western and Northern European cities housing estates have over time become spatially clustered sites of problems. Despite the spatial dimension of many of the discussions, the book lacks strong spatial analysis. Rectifying this could be the next step in this ambitious comparative research project.

The everyday experiences of reconstruction and regeneration: from vision to reality in Birmingham and Coventry by *David Adams* and *Peter Larkham*, Routledge, Abingdon, UK, 2019, 196 pp. ISBN 978–1–4724–7117–8. Set within a wider British and international context of post-Second World War reconstruction in which many cities, bombed or not, were radically restructured, this book focuses on debates and experiences in Birmingham and Coventry as they recovered from bomb damage and, soon thereafter, industrial collapse. It explores the initial development of post-war reconstruction projects, highlighting the novel scale and form of new buildings and infrastructure projects (notably ring roads). Decision-making at local and national levels is reviewed, as are the experiences of professionals and members of the public affected by these long-duration urban reconstruction and then renewal projects. Exploring these cities throughout the post-war period brings into sharp focus the duality of contemporary approaches to regeneration, which often criticize mid-twentieth century 'poorly conceived' planning and architectural projects for producing inhuman and unsympathetic schemes on too large a scale, while proposing very similar large-scale regeneration schemes that could potentially create problems in the future.

Towers for the welfare state: an architectural history of British multi-storey housing 1945–1970 by *Stefan Muthesius* and *Miles Glendinning*, Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies, Edinburgh, UK, 2017, 266 pp. ISBN 978–1–9999205–2–4. This is the authors' second substantial volume on tower blocks, and usefully brings the first up to date with the numerous and complex alterations, and indeed demolitions, of blocks across the country. Not a typo-morphological study, but a history of design, planning, construction and use, this is nevertheless a useful study of a building type that dominated post-war cities. Birmingham alone had over 460 blocks, though it has demolished over half of them. The authors chart this rise and fall in relation to the politics of the new post-war welfare state, funding and the need for homes, local authorities, designers and builders. The design of blocks and their surroundings is the second major section, covering the rise in height, the aesthetics of tower blocks (for social housing at least: the few but arguably more successful private blocks are not covered), new types of flats, and the links between construction and design. A final section comprises case studies of 17 cities and regions. Following the fire in 2017 in the Grenfell block in London, which came too late for this volume, it inevitably reads like an assessment of whether there is any merit in this building type.