



## BOOK NOTES

**Saverio Muratori architetto: Modena 1910 – Roma 1973 a centro anni dalla nascita.** edited by *Giancarlo Cataldi*, Aion Edizioni, Florence, Italy, 2013, 223 pp. ISBN 978-88-98262-03-8. This impressive collection of essays is the proceedings of a six-session travelling conference that stopped in Modena, Venice, Rome, Genoa, Milan and finally Delft between October 2010 and October 2012. Editor Giancarlo Cataldi has convened 42 of the most prominent Italian architecture academics and one French and one British to reflect on the intellectual production and legacy of architect Saverio Muratori on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his birth. The seven sections cover the following topics: the science of the city and territory; architectural thinking; the teaching of the architectural and urban project; the professional architectural production of Muratori; urban revitalization; and finally, the influence of his work. Some essays aim at putting into perspective the oppositions and dissensions elicited by Muratori's thought provoking ideas that were, and still are, in many ways confronting the dominant architectural currents. Other essays explore apparent contradictions and gaps within the different facets of the master's work and in particular between his scientific and architectural production.

**La biorégion urbaine: petit traité sur le territoire bien commun** by *Alberto Magnaghi* (translation by *Emmanuelle Bonneau*), Étérotopia France, Paris, France, 2014, 174 pp. ISBN 979-10-93250-00-7. Based on essays published in Italian between 2012 and 2014, this constitutes a very good introduction to the 'territorialist' approach developed since the 1990s by Alberto Magnaghi and his collaborators at the Laboratory for Ecological Design of Settlements at Florence University. The territory is defined as a nexus of relations, the temporary result of the long-term co-evolution of a human habitat and a natural substratum. However, a process of 'de-territorialization' characterizes our times. Political economy conjunctures have prompted flows of goods, people and capital at unprecedented levels globally, while imposing new spatial and material

orders locally. The results are evidently highly disruptive socially, culturally and for ecosystems. A radical alternative model and new planning tools are proposed. Since any such project cannot operate and flourish in isolation, a radical, yet perfectly coherent outcome would be networks of self-governed bioregions generating bottom-up globalization. A planning experiment has been going on for 25 years in Italy that articulates a promising response.

**O tempo e a forma** edited by *Carlos Dias Coelho*, Argumentum, Lisbon, Portugal, 2014, 207 pp. ISBN 978-972-8479-79-4. This is the second title to be released from a collection of four that was initiated by the publication of *Os elementos urbanos* (reviewed by François Dufaux in this issue). This new opus is admirably illustrated, as was the first title from which it reproduces efficient and elegant graphic methods. In nine chapters from as many contributors, it explores the temporal dynamics of the Portuguese city. The first essay, by Carlos Dias Coelho, proposes a theoretical exploration of the different times, or 'tempos', affecting urban transformation by reviewing different modalities of morphological change. The following chapters introduce case studies of different transformation mechanisms affecting specialized buildings or urban tissues.

**Designing urban transformation** by *Aseem Inan*, Routledge, New York, USA, 2014, 249 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-83770-5. This is about redefining the practice and purpose of urban design – re-labelled urbanism to mark the shift. The argument is that this loosely defined field fails, more often than not, to meet expectations. The author finds explanations in the fact that professional practice in particular is too centred on material objects per se, and that both the conceptual framework and the practice ignore 'the deeper political economic structures that actually shape cities'. To answer the question 'what can urbanism be?', a new conceptualization rooted in the philosophy of pragmatism is offered. Ten case

studies from around the world and very diverse in nature illustrate the principles and their application. Three conceptual shifts are proposed: (1) to consider the city as flux rather than focusing on material objects; (2) to concentrate and base our judgment on the consequences of design rather than on the initial intentions; and (3) to espouse urbanism as a creative political act rather than as a professional practice limited in its scope, and condemned as a consequence to reproduce the political economic order. There is a paradox in the fact that the case studies are from different parts of the world, including remarkable work in India by the author herself, though the theoretical perspective is from the US. Urban morphology is mentioned in passing, but not well understood. Morphologists would have a lot to contribute to the idea of the city as flux. Proponents of the Italian territorialist school, it could also be argued, have developed and applied similar principles over 25 years.

**Dead end: suburban sprawl and the rebirth of American urbanism** by *Benjamin Ross*, Oxford University Press, New York, USA, 2014, 249 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-936014-7. Based on a detailed investigation of the origins of the American suburbs in the broader contexts of urbanization and planning histories, this book develops a fresh perspective on urban sprawl in the US. It demonstrates how an improbable land tenure system developed in the suburbs has made any reform extraordinarily difficult to implement ever since. The author contends that the planning, legal and governance apparatus, first developed in the suburb, has since affected and influenced other territories, such as gentrified and ethnic neighbourhoods. Deed covenants – agreed upon by first generations of buyers and enforced by homeowner associations – zoning, and historic preservation in more recent times, have combined to ‘embalm’ built landscapes in their original state. Ironically, forces endorsing inertia defy the usual left-right divide, as rightists espouse restrictions to the sacrosanct market logics, while leftists oppose environmental-friendly measures on the ground that they could have negative effects on the vulnerable populations of inner cities. Ross finds reasons to be optimistic in the fact that proponents for change could also be found from both sides of the political landscape and that the traumatic 2008 housing

crisis might constitute a turning point.

**Atlas of cities** edited by *Paul Knox*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, USA, 2014, 256 pp. ISBN 978-0-691-15781-8. Nineteen authors contribute to what is no less than a general introduction to the history of urban civilization. The book is organized in terms of thirteen themes arranged chronologically, including the ‘foundational city’, the ‘rational city’ and the ‘megacity’. Following an introduction to a theme, each chapter typically portrays an exemplary city, called a ‘core city’, and representative ‘secondary cities’. Excellent use is made of material from authoritative secondary sources, statistics and straightforward graphic and cartographic illustrations. The theme of the ‘networked city’ offers a good example of the richness of the approach. In that case, nine late medieval and sixteenth-century European cities serve as the background for the exploration of sub-themes such as ‘the commercial revolution of the thirteenth century’, ‘transport in late-medieval Europe’ and the ‘cityscape of the networked city’, examined at different geographical scales. The *Atlas of cities* is a useful tool to introduce undergraduates to the historical richness of urban phenomenon.

**The city as a project** edited by *Pier Vittorio Aureli*, Ruby Press, Berlin, Germany, 2014, 2nd edition, 344 pp. ISBN 978-3-944074-06-1. Eight thoroughly researched essays, put into context by Pier Vittorio Aureli, explore planned cities from different geographical locations and epochs, as well as planning and design devices such as Durand’s typological method and Hannes Meyer’s collaborative designs. The ways in which purposeful planning and design practices serve the political order that determines them are highlighted. The ‘political theology’ that informs the traditional Islamic city is examined, as are the expressions of various political-economic circumstances in Meso-american, European Renaissance, Baroque and Fordist cities. Even the liberal and neo-liberal city, the product of a laissez-faire attitude that is, on the surface, contrary to a purposeful approach, is given a form and materiality by means of ‘protocols’ and ‘archetypes’, as evidenced by the case of modern Athens.