



BOOK NOTES

Sustainable London? The future of a global city edited by *Rob Imrie* and *Loretta Lees*, Policy Press, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK, 2014, 325 pp. ISBN 978-1-44731-060-0. Sixteen researchers, practitioners and activists in the fields of geography, planning and public policy, reflect on the city of London's attempts to plan for a sustainable future in the last 25 years or so. The collection of essays centres on issues of social sustainability and equitability, understood within a broader political-economic context at the city and national levels. Now that the notion of sustainability has become pervasive in policy and political discourses, what about the outcomes and impacts of actual policies devised under that name? The authors share the view that so-called sustainable development policies globally have failed to deliver on their promises – even contributing to worsening the situation, in particular as far as social equitability is concerned. There is a fundamental contradiction that permeates urban planning discourses, practices and policies in London. It stems from the conception that economic growth needs to be pursued while ensuring social equity and, at the urban level, improvement of environmental conditions. An even more paradoxical interpretation posits that economic growth is a precondition to improving the conditions of living of all social groups, and to the funding of eco-friendly initiatives. Collectively, the contributors produce a detailed account of how such confusion translates into planning policy inconsistencies and incongruous outcomes. At the micro-level, for example, so-called 'property led regeneration', supported by the state and conducted by the private sector in derelict sectors, generates economic activity, but at the cost of inflated property values and rent rises. At a broader level, following in particular the 2008 crisis, austerity policies such as privatization of housing stock have had similar impacts. The objectives of maintaining London's status as a global city, and consolidating its position as the premier financial centre, have increased

the city's social inequities by contributing to make its cost of living one of the highest in the world. Though focusing on the case of London, this book illustrates the fundamental contradiction that marks many sustainable development policies and practices, particularly since the science of climatic change has started to point more directly to the economic model of development as a culprit. While touching only indirectly on matters pertaining to the city's built environment, *Sustainable London?* is of interest to those involved in physical planning.

Europe city: lessons from the European prize for urban public space edited by *Diane Grey*, Lars Müller, Zurich, Switzerland, 2015, 200 pp. ISBN 978-3-03778-474-7. This is the culmination of a 15-year enterprise initiated by the Centre of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona in association with five European architectural museums. The 'lessons' take the form of a series of short essays accompanying presentations of 54 of the projects featured in the biennial competitions. There are seven themes: memory, mobility, mixture, margins, waterfront, marketplace, and democracy. The focus is not on design per se, but rather on how material interventions relate to broader issues. The essays, diverse in their approach, touch on the ways in which Europeans have used their public spaces, while the presented projects reinterpret this shared experience in contemporary terms. Delving into shared histories and cultures, there is a quest for the meaning and nature of public space. Judith Carrera and Zygmunt Bauman, among other contributors, stress the political significance of public space as 'a meeting place between the individual and the collective interests': it is a 'locus of discord', where 'civil and political rights are conquered', in Carrera's words. However, as a meeting ground and a place of mediation, public space constitutes also a much-needed *agora* in a globalized world of migration and 'diasporization', as Bauman puts it.

Reform! Essays on the political economy of urban form. Vol. 4 edited by *Marc Angélil* and *Sarah Nichols*, Ruby Press, Berlin, Germany, 2015, 152 pp. ISBN 978-3-944074-12-2. This is the fourth in the series *Essays on the political economy of urban form* developed at WERK 11, a research hub of ETH Zurich. The series centres on the city as a physical manifestation of political economy frameworks, but also as a disputed field in which new planning and architectural practices and approaches can disrupt or challenge such prevailing frameworks. Each volume is accompanied by good quality colour illustrations. The volume on 'Reform!' is comprised of four essays that consider the production of urban realities at different spatial resolutions. Rahul Mehrotra analyses Mumbai's emergent urban forms against the backdrop of the city's planning history and more recent laissez-faire attitude. In 'Letting go of the city', Jason Young writes about the disciplinary shortcomings of urbanism to appropriately engage with new and unforeseeable territorial configurations of post-industrial Detroit. In their essay, 'From shelter to subsistence', Sarah Nichols and Martino Tattara report on a project aimed at accommodating the displaced populations in Diyarbakir, Turkey, and reflect on the limited ambitions of public housing programmes. The fourth essay, by Freek Persyn, traces the genesis of the conception of a mix-use tower in Tirana, the capital of Albania, while reflecting upon the part played by collaboration in that process.

Street smart: the rise of cities and the fall of cars by *Samuel I. Schwartz*, PublicAffairs, New York, USA, 2015, 292 pp. ISBN 978-1-61039-564-9. This is a first-person account of the 4-decade journey of urban transportation expert and former New York City traffic commissioner and Department of Transportation's chief engineer Samuel I. Schwartz. Though not having academic pretensions, this well-researched book abounds in pertinent information on the history of transportation planning and on engineering practices and their tangible outcomes and shortcomings. It is pertinent reading for current and future city planners who need to better understand the institutional context and preconceived notions and premises that informed the shift towards automobile in town planning. In the author's own

words, it documents 'the original war for the right-of-way [that] was fought nearly a century ago, in which roads were transformed from multipurpose commercial and social real estate into single-use arteries for automobile travel' (p. 238). Written in an engaging and often amusing way, it develops an alternative 'street smart' vision. A wide variety of examples from around the world that seek to retrofit urban landscapes and transportation infrastructures in order to offer alternatives to the automobile are utilized. Well beyond the cataloguing of 'best practices', it is a serious and critical reflection. Of particular interest are the impacts of so-called smart technologies on recent behavioural trends, and the use of such technologies to upgrade transportation systems and make these easier to use and navigate. Though the book reads well, the endnotes are not properly indicated within the body of the text.

In pursuit of a living architecture: continuing Christopher Alexander's quest for a humane and sustainable building culture edited by *Kyriakos Pontikis* and *Yodan Rofé*, Common Ground Publishing, Champaign, IL, USA, 2016, 503 pp. ISBN 9781612298764. Here 25 contributors, most of them students and collaborators of Christopher Alexander, reassess his highly influential work, some 50 years after the publication of his first book *Notes on the synthesis of form* (1964). The collection of essays is in three parts. Part one, entitled 'Conceptual perspectives', includes contributions that situate Alexander's intellectual labour in the broader philosophical and epistemological contexts of the period. Some key theoretical tenets are also revisited. The second part centres on 'Models and methods' of the living architecture approach from both cognitive and applied perspectives. The third part presents 'Reflections on projects', by contributors offering insights on their work on projects at various scales, ranging from building components to community design. Most of them discuss how Alexander's ideas have informed their own professional practice, teaching, or academic research agendas. However, some contributions are critical of the pseudo-scientific nature of some of Alexander's formulations and highlight limitations in his theoretical approach (Seamon, Week). Conversely, others highlight how later scientific and philosophical

developments have given credence to Alexander's intuitions (Salingaros and Masden, Cowan, but also Seamon and Week themselves). Some themes percolate throughout the group of essays. The quest for a living architecture is portrayed as an attempt to embrace complexity of the kind found in vernacular and pre-industrial contexts (Andrews, Quillien). Accordingly, some essays critically address the current mode of production of the built environment and the training of future professionals (Pontikis, Mehaffy, Seemann), and envisage the possibility of post-industrial craftsmanship (H. Davis). One theme permeates a large number of contributions: the similarities and complementarities of living architecture, sustainable development and eco-design approaches (Tavel, Kho, Pontikis, Gutsche, Langstaff). Pontikis revisits the notion of 'living architecture' in a line of inquiry that points to new and seemingly fertile territories in which the intellectual exploration initiated by Alexander could be pursued further.

Villes et changements climatiques: îlots de chaleur urbains / Cities and climate change: urban heat islands edited by *Jean-Jacques Terrin*, Éditions Parenthèses, Marseille, France, 2015, 285 pp. ISBN 978-2-86364-243-6. This is an account, in French with an English translation, of the work conducted in two symposia on urban heat islands held in Barcelona and Vienna in November 2014 and March 2015. In his introduction, the editor, Jean-Jacques Terrin stresses the importance of urban heat islands in the context of climatic change. Besides geographical factors, the particularities of urban forms and local material conditions exert a great influence on the nature and intensity of the threat. Such a multiplicity of factors calls for a wide array of approaches and methods dealing with different space and time scales. The same conclusions apply to operational attempts at improving energy and environmental performance in different urban contexts, both from a technical and a policy perspective. Architectural and urban forms are central considerations here. An important paradox relates to the fact that the compact city forms that are deemed environmentally desirable, in particular for curbing transportation GHG emissions, are also significantly exacerbating urban heat island effects (p. 28). The core

of the book revolves around ten case studies, by 21 contributors. Nine European cities: Barcelona, Lyon, Marseille, Nantes, Rennes, Roma, Stuttgart, Toulouse, Wien and of one North American city, Montréal, offer a sample of evidence-based strategies and policies that address different facets of the problem. Together, these experiences stress the necessity of multidisciplinary approaches that mobilize urban design, engineering, landscape architecture, environmental science, and social sciences. Serge Salat summarizes the cooling strategies illustrated by the case studies with an image: the 'white, green and blue' cities. The white city reflects radiation off its surfaces, the green city benefits from the shade produced by its canopy and from cooler permeable surfaces, while the blue city capitalizes on the cooling virtues of moisture's evaporation. Reflecting upon the ten cases studies, Marjorie Musy and Anne Péré draw preliminary conclusions on the current knowledge and heuristic tools pertaining to urban heat islands, as well as on the planning and policy approaches that attempt to mitigate the problem.

Limits: space as resource by *Vanessa Miriam Carlow*, Jovis Verlag GmbH, Berlin, Germany, 2016, 159 pp. ISBN 978-3-86859-408-9. Starting from the premise that space is a finite resource, Carlow provides a case for spatial 'containment strategies'. Two European cities offer substance: the walled-up West Berlin from 1961 to 1989, and London's Green Belt, in existence since 1958. In London the focus is on the 'containing medium', the Green Belt itself. The analysis of Berlin centres rather on the circumscribed area per se, and its urban fabrics. Key to the investigation, are cartographic representations. Physical and spatial realities are transcribed in thematic and composite maps. Unsuspected forms are revealed, such as the 'noise scape' generated by air and motorway traffic. The systematic investigation of uses and functions that are accommodated by the Green Belt points to its shifting and unanticipated role. A so-called 'infrabelt' is revealed that extends between the city limits and the M25 motorway. It accommodates an array of functions, such as airport facilities, energy production, and even leisure spaces that proved essential to consolidate London's status as a global city. In West Berlin, the urban boundary was impassable. The

enquiry hence focuses on emerging spatial patterns and strategies that allowed growth and adaptation 'from within', to meet evolving housing and infrastructural needs. These translated into unconventional and 'innovative spatial compositions and functional combinations' (p. 142), such as small-scale and low-rise housing densification, use of air rights over transportation infrastructure, the creation of urban hybrids (deemed 'interdependent typologies') and building innovations to adapt to challenging conditions (such as buildings doubling as sound barriers). Containment in London has limited, and in West Berlin prevented, the modification of space at the periphery, effectively curtailing real estate speculation as a key driver of spatial expansion. The solutions that have resulted suggest examples to be emulated.

Mexico City: between geometry and geography / entre geometría y geografía edited by *Felipe Correa* and *Carlos Garcíavaz Alfaro*, Applied Research and Design, Novato, CA, USA, 2014, 352 pp. ISBN 978-1-940743-08-0. In words that will resonate with morphologists, Peter G. Rowe stresses in his foreword, that mapping here serves at 'representing and knowing the city as well as conveying that knowledge', [hence] yielding understanding of the city's 'underlying order(s) of urban form' (p. 6). In a large format, with texts in Spanish and English, and abundant iconographic and cartographic material of exceptional quality, the book provides a 'graphic biography' of the metropolis of Mexico City and an account of its morphogenesis in seven chapters interspersed with short essays by invited collaborators. Chapter 1 explores the origins of the city of Tenochtitlan, founded by the Aztecs in 1325 on an island in Lake Texcoco, and the transformations that followed the Hispanic conquest. A sophisticated settlement comprising four neighbourhoods, causeways, canals and *chinampas*, or floating agricultural fields, as well as aqueducts, provided the morphological matrix upon which the Spaniards laid out an orthogonal grid. This was a prelude to spatial expansion operations involving massive land reclamation and infill, which resulted in the loss of the lacustrine character of the city. Chapter 2 traces the period, starting in the mid-nineteenth century, in which the city outgrew its original perimeter as rapid urbanization unfolded. The following

four chapters investigate four key components of the current urban form: the 'Mobility systems'; the so-called 'Large urban footprints', the collective infrastructures, such as university campuses, hospitals, parks and airports; the 'Housing stock', which is the object of typological investigation of representative architectural and urban tissue forms; and finally, the 'Hydrological landscapes'. Chapter 7 envisages a potential future that is informed by history and inherited spatial configurations. It makes an argument in favour of seizing the opportunity offered by the current wave of investments in large-scale mass transit infrastructures to redefine the city form.

Density and atmosphere: on factors relating to building density in the European city by *Eberhard Tröger*, edited by *Dietmar Eberle*, Birkhäuser, Basel, Switzerland, 2015, 536 pp. ISBN 978-3-99043-567-0. This is an exploration on the theme of density in relation to the 'atmosphere', in 36 districts in four Central European cities: Berlin, Munich, Vienna and Zurich. It uses quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse how building densities are spatially manifested in a variety of urban forms, and evaluates how such differing manifestations inform the streetscape and public collective space more broadly. The streetscape serves here as a proxy for the somewhat elusive concept of 'atmosphere'. Building density, is utilized to classify the 36 districts in nine density categories. Thirteen so-called 'parameters' are used for the analysis. They consist of spatial, social, economic and historical indicators. The first half of the book comprises comparative analyses of the districts that fall in each of the density categories. The parameters are used to characterize the urban form of each district, and to assess the specific relationship between these forms and densities on the one hand and the quality of the streetscape, namely the ambience produced, on the other hand. The second half consists of a 'Density catalog', comprising photographs, maps and diagrams. For each district, photographs of typical streetscapes and aerial photographs (scale 1:5000) are accompanied by figure-ground maps and colour-coded maps. A section entitled 'Density stories' completes the study. It consists of personal accounts of their respective cities by four authors.

Housing Cairo: the informal response edited by *Marc Angélil* and *Charlotte Malterre-Barthes*, Ruby Press, Berlin, Germany, 2016, 306 pp. ISBN 978-3-944074-17-7. This is about the massive informal urbanization in Cairo, Egypt. It is estimated that about 60 per cent of the city's population of 20 million inhabitants currently reside in so-called informal settlements. Most of the research effort on informal settlements is concerned with the social, economic and political economy aspects of the phenomenon. The general circumstances leading to the current situation in Cairo, starting with a dysfunctional state, failing neoliberal housing policies and unsuccessful attempts at curtailing informal urbanization, are addressed by several contributors to *Housing Cairo*. But the book focuses more on the material and spatial aspects of the 'architecture of informality', and its production mechanisms. Some 30 contributors try to decipher these complex realities, armed with typological and morphological methods. Lessons for architecture and urban design are acquired, which are then translated

into architectural prototypes embracing this 'new vernacular', while rectifying some of its shortcomings. Most of Cairo's informal development takes place on agricultural land at the immediate periphery of the city. The chapter on 'A new vernacular' traces typological processes from the 1950s onwards: from the individual house to the tower, all built using a concrete structure with brick infill, and from a village type to an urban dwelling type (Kouviri and Yong, p. 78). As neighbourhoods take shape, small-scale independent shops and services develop along their wider streets. Owner-builders typically turn to community-based saving mechanisms for funding. Seven architectural and urban design projects reinterpreting the new vernacular culture are presented, including one urban agricultural production and transformation project. Several short essays conclude the volume. They consider continuing problems, such as the loss of agricultural land to informal development and the regularization of illegal settlements, and point to potential future research and practice.
