



## BOOK NOTES

**Inventons la métropole du Grand Paris. Inventing the greater Paris metropolis** edited by *Alexandre Labasse*, Éditions du Pavillon de l’Arsenal, Paris, France, 2017, 768 pp. ISBN 978-2-35487-039-3. This is reporting and documenting an interesting planning and design experiment in the Paris region. A so-called ‘consultation process’ was conducted under the tutelage of three key actors: Métropole du Grand Paris, a public intermunicipal co-operative agency acting on behalf of 131 municipalities in France’s capital region; the Prefecture of Île-de-France, which manages infrastructure, urbanization and regional development; and Société du Grand Paris, the public agency that is steering the Grand Paris Express metro development, including the transit stations and their surroundings. Such a governance framework allowed the establishment of a regional planning programme which entailed the redevelopment of strategic sites. A call for proposals to municipalities first delivered 112 prospective sites, that were then reduced to 55 after analysis, including 19 in direct proximity to Grand Express stations. An international call for proposals generated 420 candidacies from consortiums comprised of architecture, development and investment firms. Of the 164 consortiums retained, 153 developed fully-fledged proposals for the 55 sites scattered in eleven neighbourhoods in the periphery of Paris. Those proposals, first exhibited at the Pavillon de l’Arsenal, are made accessible to a wider audience in this beautifully illustrated catalogue.

**Barcelona. Sant Adria’ de Besos waterfront regeneration project** by *Marco Maretto*, RAM Publishing, Rome, Italy, 2016, 194 pp. ISBN 978-1-326-94523-7. This is reporting on the *Workshops in architecture and urban morphology* (W.A.M.) conducted in Barcelona in 2015. It follows similar workshops held in 2013 and also chronicled in a book entitled *Helsinki South Harbour regeneration project*. Under the

guidance of academics, practitioners and local experts, a group of graduate students reflect on the redevelopment prospects of a city’s core area, and then devise a redevelopment scheme. The work of W.A.M. can be equated with action-research. Ingrained in the Italian morphological tradition, it mobilizes process typological methods to proceed with what Maretto calls a ‘structural’ reading of the material and spatial context. Morphological reading methods are introduced (Maretto, ch. 2), classical morphology is complemented by the analysis of recent transformations in Barcelona (Roca and Marti, ch. 4) and by methods of assessing the bioclimatic conditions associated with urban forms (Gherri, ch. 5). Such contributions prepare the ground for what could be deemed ‘evidence-based design’. The morphological and the bioclimatic approaches, used in conjunction, allow consideration of the complexities of environments sedimented in the *longue durée*, while addressing the environmental imperatives of the present. The seven urban projects, presented in a standardized, straightforward format that facilitates comprehension, testify to the pertinence and usefulness of these methods. Urban design practitioners and trainees, and teachers of urban morphology, will appreciate this tool of high pedagogical value.

**Faire la ville par le projet** edited by *Muriel Delabarre* and *Benoît Dugua*, Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes, Lausanne, Switzerland, 2017, 328 pp. ISBN 978-2-88915-230-8. This collection of essays in French is in honour of Swiss professor and urbanist Antonio Da Cunha. The title could be loosely translated as ‘Making the city through the project’. The French term *projet*, used routinely in architectural and planning contexts, does not translate easily into English (other Romance languages have, for example, *proyecto*, *progetto*, and *projeto*). Co-editor Delabarre refers to the Latin etymology of *projectus*, which means jutting out or projecting forward, as an apt metaphor for thinking about

and imagining urban futures. The term conveys the notions of project, plan, scheme, venture, and even design. In the continental European context in particular, it is argued that since the 1980s the project has largely replaced the master plan as the main operational tool of urbanism (a term often preferred of late to urban or city planning). Three factors favoured such a shift from comprehensive planning to a project approach. First, the latter calls for targeted public and private investments, seen as key to leveraging broader changes. Secondly, the project is deemed more flexible, as transactions and negotiations between actors replace a top-down approach. Thirdly, it is linked to a regained interest for engaging local morphological conditions through physical planning and design. The project approach to urban development has been criticized for its conceptual blind spots and its limitations in delivering on its promises. However, Delabarre and the other contributors are making the argument, following Da Cunha's contention, that the urban project, at different spatial resolutions, represents the most promising *modus operandi* for a sustainable city. The project, it is hypothesized, operates at three different epistemic levels. At the pragmatic level, it acts as an operational tool for making the sustainable city. At the reflexive level, it produces situated and paradigmatic knowledge. And at the retrospective level, the project allows engagement with long-term processes, including the morphogenetic processes of which the urban context is the temporary result, before assessing potential futures. In the words of Delabarre, the latter two levels create the possibility of an 'epistemological urbanism'.

**Infinite suburbia** edited by Alan M. Berger, Joel Kotkin, with Celina Balderas Guzmán, Princeton Architectural Press, Hudson, NY, USA, 2017, 771 pp. ISBN 978-1-61689-550-1. This is a compendium on suburban development around the world, comprising 52 essays by 74 contributors including the editors. As stressed in the editors' introduction, suburbia is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, yet the fields of planning and design 'lack a robust unbiased intellectual and theoretical platform to examine and debate it' (p. 10). Scouting worthwhile perspectives on suburban development led them to solicit diverse contributions. They address spatial and

physical, functional, social, political and environmental aspects of the suburban phenomenon, and include topics such as design models, transport modes and infrastructure, governance, social diversity and inequalities, ecological functions and neoliberal property markets. A diagram conveniently maps the contributions by connecting each to two or more themes, hence allowing the reader to navigate the compendium along thematic lines rather than as a succession of papers. Chapters are devoted to the drive for upward mobility; polycentric metropolitan form; metropolitan economic relationships; harnessing ecological productivity; the scales of governance, and the future of the polycentric metropolis. Of special interest for urban morphologists is the chapter on suburban forms, in which the particular challenges of coping with material and spatial complexity are discussed, including the difficulty of characterizing and measuring a wide variety of conditions across scales. Urban designers and landscape architects will particularly appreciate the attention dedicated to the ecological retrofitting of suburbia in a chapter in which its untapped ecological potential is considered.

**Chandigarh rethink: transforming ruralities & edge(ness) in global urbanities** edited by Manu P. Sobti, ORO Editions, Novato, CA, USA, 2017, 279 pp. ISBN 978-1-939621-36-8. This is a contribution to what is becoming a sub-genre in its own right: books reporting on the work of graduate students in planning and urban design. Characterized by its independence from administrative and contractual constraints, such work can produce fresh perspectives on the development of a city, though it may be of limited interest beyond people familiar with the area. In some cases, innovative teaching methods will appeal to a broader audience of instructors. The most compelling publications are those that articulate a strong theoretical perspective. Such is the case with Chandigarh rethink, which makes the argument that development at the edges, in particular in India, and more broadly in Global South cities, often presents urbanization that is truer to the local social and political conditions than the institutionalized development that marks more central locations. Chandigarh, the epitome of grand modernist planning and design servicing a centralized political

vision, is a case in point. Sobti posits that an urban edge denotes a physical condition, a metaphoric concept, and a design methodology. Such tenets are derived from empirical work and explorations through design from a series of urban design studios conducted by him in India. In the first chapter, he develops the idea that edges should be looked at from 'within' rather than from 'without', and in terms of de-ruralization rather than urbanization. Such a perspective allows unveiling of the 'ex-urban landscape matrix'. For urban morphologists, such ideas are certainly evocative of fringe-belt theories, and more broadly of the notions that natural and human-made barriers and boundaries, as well as inherited spatial forms, such as agricultural allotment patterns, are informing morphogenesis. Five essays by invited contributors explore development at the social, political and spatial margins in Chandigarh, and beyond. In 2009 and 2015, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's School of Architecture and Urban Planning urban design students collaborated with their peers from local institutions to explore Chandigarh's urbanization processes and prospects. Their work is featured in the second half of the book.

**Why are most buildings rectangular? And other essays on geometry and architecture** by Philip Steadman, Routledge, Abingdon, UK, 2018, 270 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-22655-5. These twelve essays have been published by Steadman and some of his collaborators since 2006, with the exception of one piece published in 1987. The seemingly banal question in the title acts as the starting point for an enquiry into some geometrical determinants of architecture. Different methods are mobilized to explore morphometric (shape), metrological (dimensional) and compositional (topological) characteristics of form, sometimes in the abstract, sometimes empirically, either quantitatively or qualitatively. An example of abstract exploration is provided by 'rectangular dissections' which answer the question: when ignoring dimensions, how many arrangements of – say four, five or six – rectangles are possible within a rectangle? The answer to such a question allows comparison of theoretical arrangements to actual building layouts of different models of the house. The constraint of access to natural light and

ventilation, which has been a determining factor of conception for most of the history of building construction, leads to explorations of the geometry of buildings, either based on empirical work or on geometrical simulations. Comprised of four parts: rectangular and circular plan geometry is addressed in Part 1; the history and evolution of building types, such as the penitentiary, the department store and the multi-storey garage, in Part 2; the built and urban form in relation to questions of geometry, energy and building density in Part 3; and theoretical discussions on 'possibility in built forms', from both explanatory and applied perspectives, in Part 4.

**The social fabric of cities** by Vinicus M. Netto, Routledge, Abingdon, UK, 2017, 241 pp. ISBN 978-1-472-47066-9. The title of this book is a reference to the seminal book *The social logic of space* by Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson (1984). Central to both books is the role of urban form for co-presence and human encounter or the opposite, absence and non-encounter, as constitutive elements of segregation. Segregation is usually seen as a form of geographical social differentiation, resulting in weak interaction between groups. Netto argues that the role of urban space cannot be contained in territorial segregation. He proposes, in line with other scholars, a more complex way to understand segregation where it is seen as the result of actions and relations between people. In other words, segregation can better be understood when describing it in terms of social dynamics instead of geographic differences in localization. Netto shows this by mapping traces of movement that can more accurately reveal the potential for social encounters in cities. The book is divided into three parts: Part 1 introduces the above argument, including some empirical tests; Part 2 builds the theoretical argument, leaning heavily on social science theories; Part 3 connects this approach of cities as 'systems of encounter and communication' to cities as 'material interaction' where the geometric characteristics of the urban block are central, again including some empirical tests to support the argument. The contribution of this book lies in the thoroughly constructed argument linking the physical to the social and combining the theoretical argument with empirical tests.