

describes the main methods and sources for the analysis of urban form, which are developed in the following chapters. Here, the sources and the scales of analysis are well described in a very short but relevant way. This methodology, together with the systemic approach and the relational semantic system, is the framework for the construction of a 'grammar' and can provide a useful paradigm for a systematic study of urban form.

To complete the requirements of the dynamic analysis, the diachronic point of view is then specified, in Chapter 2 on *L'économie et l'utopie: les facteurs explicatifs des formes urbaines*. This deals with the concept of process. Here, the author develops his argument by deconstructing different causal modes: first, he shows the influence of each cause (social, economic, political and cultural) separately over the evolution of urban form. Then, by using again the systemic analysis of the interaction of different causes, he gives a comprehensive insight into the complexity of morphological processes.

This approach, seen as a system of complex causality, is based on a dialectical point of view in which the confrontation between processes and inertial elements is the main explanatory engine of morphological changes. Indeed, the creation and transformation of the city shape is analysed via the dynamics induced by socio-economic developments, innovative techniques and cultural or political influences on the production of forms. These productive forces encounter a 'site resistance' illustrated by topography and cultural legacy. Here Allain uses Fernand Braudel's conjuncture cycles (the French traditional analysis of temporal, economic and historical analysis of urban growth) as the main framework for the economic study of cities and shows the difference between the Kondratieff cycle of about 50 years and the Conzenian concept of the morphological period. This analysis is therefore completed with the examination of the cultural filters and 'unconscious schemes', called by the author 'utopias', that counterbalance the importance of the economic trends. By doing so, he aims to generalize this multi-causal influence as the main temporal key to the comprehension of the evolution of urban form but avoids deterministic and cyclical types of explanation.

This book can be regarded as a very useful bridge between a classical descriptive and aesthetic approach to old places and manuals on urban studies, which still see the city only as the 'spatial bucket' for social and economic processes. It is also the starting point for a renewal of interest in the

dynamics of urban form and its multiple interaction with social theory. In this sense this book reflects an excellent and contemporary analysis, showing that the main questions about the future of city forms cannot be simply thought of, or taught, as an old and dusty discipline. The definition of our twenty-first century's inhabited space is not reduced to museum or generic cities, but instead is full of opportunities for the reinvention of urban form with a better understanding of historically complex processes.

Notes

1. Special thanks to Sylvain Malfroy for his advice on a draft of this review and to Jeremy Whitehand for his corrections to the final draft.
2. Panerai, Ph., Castex, J. and Depaule, J-Ch. (1977) *Formes urbaines, de l'îlot à la barre* (Dunod, Paris). See also Panerai, Ph., Castex, J. and Depaule, J-Ch., English edition and additional material by Ivor Samuels, translated by Olga Vitale Samuels (2004) *Urban forms: the death and life of the urban block* (Architectural Press, Oxford).
3. Gauthiez, B. (2003) *Espace urbain. Vocabulaire et morphologie* (Editions du Patrimoine, Paris).
4. Soja, E.W. (2000) *Postmetropolis: critical studies of cities and regions* (Blackwell, Oxford).

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Building Utopia: erecting Russia's first modern city, 1930 by Richard Cartwright Austin, Kent State University Press, Kent, Ohio, 2004, 225 pp. ISBN 0-87338-730-9.

Building Utopia combines family biography with business and revolutionary history, telling the story of the Austin Company's efforts to design and construct a factory town near the Russian town of Nizhnii Novgorod in the early 1930s. The narrative revolves around a hitherto untouched source – namely, letters sent by 25 year-old Allen Austin, then a young engineer working in Nizhnii Novgorod, to his father Wilbert Austin, Austin Company owner and head, in Cleveland, Ohio. By adding commentary, background detail, and

excerpts from other Austin Company memos and internal correspondence, Richard Cartwright Austin (Allen Austin's son) produces a fluid, engaging family chronicle – one that describes their business practices, personal beliefs, and their commitment to realizing their contract to build the Gorky Automobile Factory in Soviet Russia. As such, this book does not offer a well defined scholarly argument or thesis, but rather presents an American and 'Austin Company' perspective on the Soviet experiment, particularly as realized (or partially realized) through the building of the Gorky Automobile Factory near Nizhnii Novgorod.

Austin's authority as author derives from his relationship to the Austin Company, not from any formal training in urban or Soviet Russian history. He is literally the heir to the familial, father-son correspondence upon which the book is based, and he has generously made it available to researchers through this monograph as well as by placing the letters in the care of the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, Ohio. Because of this, readers should not expect a careful, objective and extensive study of Soviet urban design. The monograph does not discuss the existing literature on the Soviet experiment or the socialist city, and it makes no reference to similar construction projects in other areas of the Soviet Union. Austin does not engage historic debates over the nature of the socialist city, although the concept of the socialist city underwent dramatic changes at the turn of the 1930s. The author, being unable to read Russian, apparently relied on assistants in conducting his research in the Nizhnii Novgorod archives. References to those materials are scarce, and they lack the standard academic reference elements – that is, a listing of the *fond*, *opis*, *delo* and *list*.

This book's value lies in its personalized nature and its unique source. As heir not only to these letters, but also to family traditions and stories, Richard Cartwright Austin is well placed to divulge the Austin Company's perspective on its activities in Russia, including its sympathies with the Soviet socialist project of modernization through economic development and education – a value that the company's mostly Methodist and capitalist directors shared with their atheist, communist counterparts in Russia. Through the letters, Austin also shares company frustration with the confused priorities of Soviet authorities, who struggled to balance the Soviet government's ambitious goals in construction with the concomitant necessity of exporting goods to earn foreign currency for technology purchases. (For instance, the regime exported high quality local lumber of the sort that

engineers needed on the construction site.) The book clearly communicates the challenges of urban development in Soviet Russia before the Second World War, when shortages of skilled labour and mechanized equipment and excesses of bureaucratic intervention produced real and metaphorical quagmires – nightmares for the Austin Company engineers on site. Readers will come to sympathize with the challenges faced by this team of American capitalists in working to build a new, factory town in communist Soviet Russia.

This monograph represents the sole English-language monograph dedicated to the making of the socialist factory town six miles up the Oka River from Nizhnii Novgorod. Those interested in the structure of this particular socialist city will enjoy reading Austin's reprint of his father's English-language news article describing the structural features of the socialist city. Although written by Allen Austin, the article arguably doubled as Soviet propaganda for American audiences, for it depicted an idealized city, not the real city – something of which most American newspaper readers were probably unaware. The article outlined Soviet plans to create a city with broad avenues, communal housing (i.e. units designed to break down the family into age units, so that individuals lived with peers rather than biological relatives), as well as 'transitional combines' (i.e. glorified communal apartments, in which families lived as a single unit, sharing kitchen and washing facilities with two other families). Richard Cartwright Austin proceeds to explore the degree to which these abstract visions were realized, tracing the history of the socialist city near Nizhnii Novgorod to the present day.

Scholars interested in urban morphology will need to turn to other sources for careful analysis of the ideological values and governing institutions that defined the fate of this city. Contrary to this book's claim to discuss a unique Soviet project, such ambitious plans for the making of Soviet factory towns (dubbed 'socialist cities') were replicated in many areas of the Soviet Union, the best-known case probably being Magnitogorsk, the subject of a superb, fairly recent scholarly monograph (Kotkin, 1995). Unlike this study, Kotkin's work outlines the current literature and provides an up-to-date bibliography of the research in the field with regard to both the socialist city and the Stalinist period of Soviet history. That said, readers may appreciate this book's numerous photographs, which come from both the Gorky Automobile Factory Museum in Nizhnii Novgorod and from Austin Company archives. Austin's detailed

descriptions and careful identification of the objects and people in the photographs serve to clearly and vividly illustrate the Soviet construction project. In sum, Austin's *Building Utopia* is not the story of the ideological conceptualization of the socialist city, but a detailed, engaging account of the adventures (and misadventures) of the American engineers and technicians of the Austin Company, who struggled to build the Gorky Automobile Factory from 1930 to 1931.

Reference

- Kotkin, S. (1995) *Magnetic mountain: Stalinism as a civilization* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA).

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Reforming suburbia: the planned communities of Irvine, Columbia, and the Woodlands by Ann Forsyth, University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif., USA, 2005, 379 pp. ISBN 0-520-24166-5.

A persistent undercurrent running throughout Ann Forsyth's study of three American master-planned communities of the 1960s and 1970s is the newness of the so-called 'New Urbanism'. While the earlier massive developments of Irvine Ranch in southern California, Columbia in Maryland, and the Woodlands in Texas may not look like 'new urbanist' projects, they do fulfill most of the design principles of the more recent movement trading under the sobriquets of New Urbanism and 'smart growth'. Forsyth thus treats these case studies not as fossils from another epoch, but as sober examples for planners today of what can still be considered cutting-edge planning ideas put into practice over three decades.

The bulk of the study is composed of an exhaustive planning history of the three case studies. With the aid of official planning materials, newspaper articles, and numerous interviews, Forsyth provides a rich narrative of the defining values and goals behind the implementation of these developments. The planned towns arose from the

'new communities' movement which defined itself in opposition to the prevalent pattern of unplanned subdivisions and 'packaged suburbs' such as Levittown, New Jersey. While the three communities shared long-term planning visions, with like-minded planners, and large scale – and they continue to be financially profitable – they differ from each other in important ways. The Irving Ranch has remained private and has focused on built form; Columbia, led by James Rouse, has pursued social goals such as racial integration and income mixing; while the Woodlands arose free of zoning but was shaped by the ecological and environmental concerns of Title VII designation. These contrasts permit Forsyth to explore nuances in their relationship to current development philosophies.

Chapter 6, 'Alternatives to sprawl?', provides a comparative study of the new communities with New Urbanism's Kentlands in Maryland and the Stapleton Airport Reuse project in Colorado. Forsyth chose not to examine some of the earlier and most publicized New Urbanist developments, such as Seaside, which lacks economic diversity, or Celebration, which does not achieve sufficient densities. Overall the developments were compared on the basis of density, aesthetics, design, identity, social equity, diversity, efficiency of access, and environmental issues. By the set criteria, Forsyth's case study communities did exceedingly well, which is a testament to their planning given their large size and maturity. In general, 'where [the new communities] have weaknesses, so do the current proposals for a new generation of best practices, because in large part the new practices mirror this older generation of responses to sprawl' (p. 271). The one area where New Urbanist developments show some strength is in their efforts to reduce automobile dependence. Conceived during the 1960s, the new communities Forsyth examines lacked transit-oriented development and the automobile remained the primary mode of transport. Nevertheless, she found that 'densities that conform to smart growth and new urbanist practices, pedestrian paths, and even mixed-use layouts are not enough in themselves to significantly shift inhabitants away from car use' (p. 269). In other words, some changes to design and layout do not lead to dramatic lifestyle changes.

Of particular interest to urban morphologists will be Forsyth's fifth chapter, 'Organizing the metropolis'. Here she examines the physical layout of the new communities, both as self-contained entities and as part of the larger metropolis. Looking to the internal organization of each