



BOOK REVIEWS

Contemporary urbanism in Brazil: beyond Brasilia edited by *Vicente Del Rio* and *William Siembieda*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA, 2009, 320pp. ISBN 978-0-8130-3281-8.

According to the authors, 'Brazil is transforming itself into a modern state, still facing many longstanding problems, yet its leaders have also realized that the city is a major arena for fostering well balanced development, social justice and full citizenship'. However, they assume that two urban ideologies, modernism and post-modernism, coexist in practice, which in the context of Brazil means that a legal framework and central planning policies by a centralized and paternalist government exist. They also believe that attention to the role of space and the construction of everyday life provides a means to understand social action (Dear, 2000). These two different ideologies structure the book, which begins with a historical background in which the evolution of urbanism in Brazil in the 1930s is the starting point. Modernist thought is presented through four papers in the section on 'Late Modernism: the struggle to control city form and function'.

The first paper on Modernism, 'Brasilia, permanence and transformations' by Maria Elaine Kohhlsdorf, Günter Kohhlsdorf and Frederico de Holanda analyses the pilot plan prepared by Costa in 1960 to set out the primary changes in urban morphology since Brasilia's founding: several urban fabrics have appeared since the city was formed which were not contemplated in the city's original plan. 'Challenges for new town design in a frontier region', by Dirceu Trindade, presents the plans for the settlement of Palmas, the capital of the state of Tocantins: it illustrates strategies and city development similar to those of Brasilia in the 1960s. Still continuing, such strategies have been

implemented in Brazil since colonial times when the government intervened to create new development-inducing poles in hinterland Brazil.

The remaining two papers show two different forms of public intervention intended to promote development. 'The vertical cityscape of São Paulo' by Silvio Macedo examines new land-use paradigms introduced first in São Paulo in the 1970s, and subsequently deployed by planning boards all over Brazil. He illustrates what Aldo Rossi regarded as the influence of a speculative process in planning, and demonstrates the implementation of land speculation and the resultant increase in wealth for the few. The same process is observed by Gilda Bruna and Heliana Vargas in 'The shopping centers shaping the Brazilian city', and is viewed as a means of creating new activity poles, which in turn promote land-value increases. This process, first implemented in São Paulo, has been followed by several examples in Brazil.

The second section of the book, entitled 'The struggle to make the best of the existing cities', presents four renewal projects developed during the recent past in Brazil. In 'The cultural corridor project: revitalization and preservation in downtown Rio de Janeiro' by Vicente del Rio and Denise Alcântara, an explanation is given of the process of improving the urban fabric around a popular retail centre in Rio de Janeiro, in accord with the local community and their needs. The case of Salvador, in the paper by Ana Fernandes and Marco Aurélio Filgueiras Gomes on 'Revising Pelourinho', describes a development project led by the state government to improve an historical centre for tourism purposes and the gentrification process that was established to bring urban improvements. 'Riverfront revitalization in the Amazon' by Simone Seabra and Alice Rodrigues, with its concern with urban renewal in northern Brazil, reflects on the use of riverfronts as leisure and

entertainment areas. The last paper in the section, by Lineu Castello, on 'Redesigning brownfields in Porto Alegre', describes the redevelopment of the site of an old factory headquarters into a shopping mall.

'The struggle to make a better city for the community' is the final section. It centres on projects developed to promote social inclusion. 'Urban design, planning and the politics of development in Curitiba', by Clara Izabal, describes the worldwide well-known planning experience of Curitiba. Despite its successes this city has been criticized and attention drawn to the contrast between its standard of living and that of the poorest neighbouring cities. Vicente del Rio's 'Reclaimed city image and street liveability', investigates the Rio Cidade projects developed by the local department of Rio de Janeiro to improve public spaces. Rio Cidade's successful outcome caused several Brazilian cities to develop similar projects, among them São Paulo, as can be discovered in the third paper 'Reshaping the metropolitan territory', by Carlos Leite, who presents contemporary planning interventions characterized as a policy to re-energize downtown areas and metropolitan cities.

The last paper, 'Upgrading squatter settlements into city neighborhoods', by Cristiane Rosa Duarte and Fernanda Magalhães, describes projects seeking to establish social inclusion, upgrade *favelas* and promote their recognition as part of the modern city's urban structure. As the paper reports, the inclusion of illegal settlements has been responsible for improving the quality of life, but official control of such expansion to date has not been so effective.

To sum up, the authors' intention was to present urbanism beyond Brasília, and to point out that there is more than the creation of this capital in Brazilian urbanism today. The careful analyses are the bases for both positive reflections and criticisms of what is happening in present-day Brazil. Contemporary urbanism is presented through a focus on successful projects implemented either as government policy or by private entrepreneurs, or characterized as mixed enterprises. However, it is necessary not to lose sight of less optimistic scenarios of modern Brazilian urbanism, which the authors of this volume tend to circumvent: the great majority of Brazilian cities suffer from chaotic urban expansion. Importantly too, since 1988 local administrative boards have been responsible for planning policies, yet most of them do not have even a single professional concerned with urban development. A lack of effective

planning policies and inadequate development control result in ugly and hazardous developments.

Reference

Dear, M. (2000) *The postmodern urban condition* (Blackwell, Oxford).

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International exhibitions and urbanism: the Zaragoza Expo 2008 project by Javier Monclús, Ashgate, Aldershot, UK, 2009, 208 pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-7650-8.

Since the 1980s local authorities, whether acting alone or in concert with the private sector, have increasingly relied upon the planning and implementation of large-scale urban development projects, such as museums, waterfronts, exhibition halls and parks, business centres, and international landmark events, to reinforce the competitiveness of their urban economies within a context of rapidly changing conditions at local, national, and global scales. Such projects have been used both for urban promotion and marketing and also as catalysts for urban regeneration and transformation.

Javier Monclús highlights the strategic role that expositions can play. Through a comparative analysis of nearly 50 events that have taken place over the past 150 years, he explores the relationships between exhibitions and urbanism from a planning perspective. The analysis of urban developments associated with expositions is particularly interesting because they are, as in the case of the Olympic Games, episodes in which urban development, architecture and urban culture are expressed within the specific framework of the host city.

For many authors, the world of expositions epitomizes the ephemeral, providing visitors with synthetic experiences and offering the cities that host them a brief moment of splendour. Here, however, the author is not so much interested in narrating the events or describing their sites, but rather in the longer-term impact that such events have on the urban structure and future development of the city. One of the main questions that Monclús