



BOOK REVIEWS

Dream city: creation, destruction, and reinvention in downtown Detroit by *Conrad Kickert*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, USA, 2019, 444pp. ISBN 978-0-262-03934-5.

This is a scrupulously-researched book that helps highlight important aspects of Detroit's complex and often contested history. Here, Kickert pieces together the changing fortunes of the city, revealing the waves of expansion, demolition and later renewal that unfurled before and during the twentieth century. Once a key icon of industrial, 'Fordist' America, Detroit stands on the verge of another renewal following years of downturn. Using a series of detailed, small-scale and intricately-produced morphological maps together with meticulously-assembled newspaper articles, photographs and academic sources, this book provides important insight into the processes of urbanization and the evolution of urban form. In so doing, it adds much-needed nuance to the more conventional narrative of creative destruction, urban decay and renaissance.

The layout and design of the book is thoughtfully considered in a way that leads the reader through the 'four stages of growth, blossoming, decline, and stagnation' (p. 5), before exploring the possibilities of rebirth and renewal. Each chapter is richly detailed and provides real insight into the changing fortunes of the city. Of course, the flow of argument may be interrupted when faced with such a complex narrative of urban change. Nonetheless, each of the fourteen chapters is clearly written and helps explicate the myriad of market forces, thwarted grand visions and other short-term solutions designed to improve Detroit's downtown. A clear story emerges of 'dashed hopes [and] faded dreams' (p. 5), and the beautifully-created maps, together with extensive primary research and historical photographs, helps convey an intricate

history of creation, destruction and reinvention of the city's downtown. *Dream city* charts the transformation of a city that was once an important 'destination for those in search of a better life' (p. 47) during the early part of the twentieth century. Attention then turns to the outward expansion of industry and populations, which revealed the 'cracks in the symbiosis between Detroit's industry and its downtown' (p. 80). Civil unrest, racial tension and decline followed, before the downtown became fashionable again, 'prompting renewed interest in loft living and entertainment' and other forms of post-industrial renewal (p. 223).

As is made clear, Detroit's downtown remains locked into a struggle with its own history of success in automobile manufacture: increased mobility led to outward growth, which in turn meant the need for more space given over to the car-owning classes, thus leading to processes of land consolidation, inward-looking buildings and a 'disconnected fabric of introverted developments' (p. 285). The book provides a careful analysis of the relationship between the changing nature and purpose of Detroit's downturn and the expansion of the city's suburbs, as 'those who could leave Detroit did so, in unprecedented numbers' (p. 190). More importantly, perhaps, *Dream city* charts how different forces combine to shape the urban fabric of the downtown area. Despite the sometimes well-intentioned ambitions of well-known planners and designers, planning objectives have repeatedly surrendered to economic processes and those powerful individuals with land and finance. The reader is left wondering whether urban managers ought to accept the inevitable 'spirit and restlessness' (p. 274) of the urban milieu rather than seeking to stabilize or impose order on such an uncontrollable mix of forces and actors.

This is a significant book that highlights the different rhythms and tempos of destruction and

rebirth; a perspective that is sometimes lost in contemporary accounts that stress how urban actors together with market forces reshape the urban fabric of former industrial areas centred on narratives of heritage and middle-class consumerist-driven regeneration. This may be successful in those developments created under the auspices of one downtown financier, providing a ‘homogenized aesthetic of cheerful building interiors, upscale ground-floor tenants, and piped music’ (p. 285), but, as this book demonstrates, this is only part of the story. Buildings, public places, parking lots and sidewalks are also in some large or small way shaped by earlier ideas and decisions, which continue to burst through to the present, hosting an uncontrollable mixture of different human and non-human elements.

Overall, this is a highly-accessible and absorbing text that will prove useful not only for urban morphologists but also for urban historians, geographers and planners. Especially for the latter group involved with the design and management of urban spaces, the methods, approaches and evidence gathered here is valuable. And while the text focuses on the fortunes of Detroit’s downtown, *Dream city* raises several important points that apply to other cities charged with developing robust, sustainable urban futures in the wake of industrial decline.

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Urban being. Anatomy & identity of the city by *Robin Renner*, Niggli (imprint of Braun Publishing AG), Salenstein, Switzerland, 2018, 315 pp. ISBN 978-3-7212-0968-6.

Urban grids. Handbook for regular city design by *Joan Busquets, Dinglang Yang* and *Michael Keller*, Harvard University Graduate School of Design / ORO Editions, Novato, CA, USA, 2019, 680 pp. ISBN 978-1-940743-95-0.

The grand projet. Understanding the making and impact of urban megaprojects edited by *Kees Christiaanse, Anna Gasco*

and *Naomi C. Hanakata*, nai010 publishers, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 2019, 640 pp. ISBN 978-94-6208-480-3.

Paris Haussmann. A model’s relevance. An analytical review of Baron Haussmann’s redevelopment of Paris from today’s perspective by *B. Jallon, U. Napolitana* and *F. Bouttée*, Park Books, Zürich, Switzerland, 2017, 264 pp. ISBN 978-3038600527.

Four recently-published books can be classified as atlases by the important role played by the collection of maps, supplemented with texts, illustrations and graphic analyses. The atlases systematically illustrate the urban landscape with a focus on urban agglomerations in the book *Urban being*, regular city designs in the book *Urban grids*, urban megaprojects in *The grand projet* and the value of the Haussmann grid for contemporary cities in *Paris Haussmann*. What the books have in common, apart from the rich set of maps, is the importance given to comparability with the aim of finding regularities in form and/or performance. As is often the case in atlases, the number of detailed descriptions of different aspects of the built environment is impressive, while the interpretative framework is less well-developed. All four books are summarised separately below, highlighting some strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, with each additional book discussed, the main differences and similarities with those already covered are highlighted.

In the introduction of the book *Urban being*, Robin Renner formulates the goal with his atlas as providing ‘the first step to improve the quality of a city’ where the understanding of its structure is key and a comparative study the means. The atlas is then organized using five levels or scales of analysis: ‘macroregion’, ‘surrounding’, ‘urban being’, ‘urban nucleus’ and ‘urban cell’. The latter is defined as the area between main arterial roads within a city, while the urban nucleus is the core of the city with most important functions, generally located in the physical centre. The urban being is the city, but not bounded by its administrative boundaries. Instead, the use of public transport, amount of traffic and economic activities define the bounding of the urban organism. The macroregion and surrounding are both defined by the distance between cities as well as their size and density. Based on this a typology is developed including, amongst others, the solitary city, a