BOOK REVIEWS

The morphology of the times: European cities and their historical growth by *Ton Hinse*, DOM Publishers, Berlin, Germany, 2014, 304 pp. ISBN 978 3869223094.

This book is about the diachronic transformations of urban form within eight European cities. Following a historical introduction on classical European town planning, based on eleven comparative plans of Greek and Roman cities at the same scale, a series of case studies is presented. These are 'snapshots of very different times' (p. 11), in which eight urban areas in European cities are analysed in depth. The Roman and Greek origins of town planning, though not the full complexities of the Roman planning system, are acknowledged. A series of functional and symbolic relations between the city grid (*kardo* and *decumanum*), the local territorial morphology (*mensura loci secundum naturam*) and the heavens (*mensura loci secundum coelum*) were the basis of a Roman design system strongly connected to the territorial morphology and indeed more sophisticated than modern design (Cataldi, 2016). The 'triumvirate of morphology, typology of spaces and architecture' (p. 11) encourages the author to see the Romans as 'Taylorist town-planners' (p. 13) – a questionable statement. Even if we consider the Roman planning system within a cyclical vision of history, and find that its modular, organic, and multi-scalar character anticipates later developments, it remains quite distant from the *machiniste* planning method of modern capitalism.

The general history of European countries, especially political and social history, is considered for its effects on changing city form. The parallels drawn between city form and social and political history are a particular contribution of the volume. Hinse sees an Islamic labyrinth in the evolution of the urban tissues of Santa Cruz in Seville: a clan-based city form, with a street pattern hierarchically organized, and terminating in narrow culs-de-sac (Guidoni, 1978). An important, largely forgotten, chapter of European history is recalled – the Islamic influence on urban form, still clearly readable today in the urban tissues of many Spanish and South Italian cities.

The Botanico district of the city of Lisbon, which derives from the Roman founded *Ulyssippona*, and the modern city of Turin, which derives from *Augusta Taurinorum*, show strong continuity of the Roman street grid. In Turin, however, the pentagonal citadel, designed by Francesco Paciotto (Pietro Francesco Tagliapietra) and his disciple Bernardino Faciotto (1564–1577), deviated systematically from the Roman grid, paving the street for the development of the modern city. The Esquilino quarter in Rome, designed and built following the annexation of the papal city to the Savoy monarchy and its transformation into a capital, is clearly the modern continuation of the Baroque Sistine plan – another case of continuity of city form. The Poblenou area in Barcelona was, however, completely surrounded and incorporated in the modern block grid designed by Ildefonso Cerdà, though maintaining to this date its pre-modern urban form as an organism resisting standardization.

The *Quartiers Modernes* in Pessac, based on Le Corbusier's project of 1924, exemplify the 'Taylorist city', based on repetition and standardization – a built example of *machiniste* urban form. The Dresden Altstadt fortification, one of the earliest based on triangular bastions, as designed by Caspar Voigt von Wierandt and Melchior Trost between 1545 and 1555, gave shape to most of the subsequent city development.

The last case considered is Vredenburg, a city district of Utrecht, apparently the Roman founded city of *Ultra Trajectum*, and forming a crossing

point of the River Rhine. Following the destruction of the city by the Vikings in 847, the medieval structure evolved into a 'cross of churches', as an evolution of the *kardo* and *decumanus* grid or, more precisely, as a *sacred* and *symbolic* medieval town planning system (Guidoni, 1974). Hinse recognizes here the role of the guilds and the city council in the city's medieval development before the Woheelse expansion changed its direction and shape in 1664. It is in the German cities though that the author finds a new 'morphology of times', as outlined in the medieval period by a collective and rational urban policy, perhaps more modern than the ancient and distant Roman grid.

All the cities analysed were considered through a modern prism, and from a northern European perspective. This can be problematic and misleading at times, when contemporary representations are superimposed on contexts framed according to other rationalities.

There are no footnotes to the text, and references to the literature of urban morphology are lacking. Connections to the general history of the evolution of cities are made without considering the history of town planning. It is therefore an introductory text, useful in engaging readers with discussions on the diachronic transformation of urban form. A diachronic approach to the evolution of urban form, has for long been a marked characteristic of the Italian school of urban morphology (Caniggia, 1963; Cataldi, 2003; Maretto, 2013). The strong disciplinary connection between history and urban morphology (Strappa *et al*., 2016) is a key to the proper understanding of city form as an evolving *organism,* and consequently to the approach to urban design as the continuation of a continuing process (Strappa, 2014). It starts with the Islamic city, and continues with the city of the guilds and municipal councils. The circulation of knowledge and design models between the Nordic culture and the Mediterranean area influences, throughout the Middle Ages, the European cities we like and live in today.

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Trees in towns and cities: a history of British urban arboriculture by *Mark Johnston*, Windgather Press, Oxford, UK, 2015, 270 pp. ISBN 978-1-909686-62-5.

Trees and other types of vegetation can easily be neglected in studies of the elements of urban form and their contribution to urban landscape character. Mark Johnston's book therefore provides a welcome introduction to the history of Great Britain's urban trees and their management from the Roman occupation to the present day.

The book is organized in thematic chapters dealing with the history of urban arboriculture as a discipline, matters of law and governance relating to trees, trees in particular spaces (gardens, public parks and other open spaces, and along streets), threats to urban trees, and the role of trees in utopian urban planning.

These themes are inevitably interlinked and the story of public access illustrates this well. Before the advent of municipal parks, access to urban green spaces was restricted by the wishes of those who controlled them (the Monarchy in the case of Royal Parks; developers and residents in the case of garden squares and walks) or ability to pay (in the