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Atlas of the Dutch urban landscape: a millennium of spatial development edited by Reinhout Rutte and Jaap Evert Abrahamse, THOTH Publishers, Bussum, The Netherlands, 2016, 303 pp. ISBN 978 90 6868 690 6.

The Netherlands is the most densely urbanized country in Europe. This outstandingly designed, and very beautiful atlas provides a synthesis of a millennium of urban spatial development for the 35 largest Dutch towns, as they were in 2010, when the research for the atlas began. The book derives from a joint project of the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands and the Faculty of Architecture, Delft University of Technology and was first published with a Dutch text in 2014. It rightly attracted reviews giving it the highest praise. This revised edition in English gives its findings wider circulation in the scholarly community, as well as amongst the general public. It is a book that is overtly embedded in the work of urban morphologists and the techniques of town-plan analysis, and also aims to revive the Dutch contribution to the *European Historic Towns Atlas* project for the modern age by using GIS and computer-generated graphics, together with comparative study.

There is a brief introduction setting out the parameters of the study, and a rather longer concluding chapter which sets the story of Dutch

towns into their broader European perspective of long-term patterns of urbanization, the chronological phases of that urbanization, and the nature of urban planning practice. The remainder of the atlas is divided into two main sections. The first provides an analysis of the development of each of the 35 towns to a common format. That format is dominated by full colour images; text is provided only to explain the images. Each town survey has within its four pages a chronological development map showing its growth phases for fixed cross-sectional years from AD 1200 to 2010 to a common scale; a schematic outline map showing landscape features that were significant shapers of the urban forms; a *Google Earth* photograph of the town in its immediate setting with district and topographical names used in the text added; a timeline showing the most important aspects of the town's development through time; two characteristic images such as a seventeenth-century topographical painting and a recent oblique air photograph; and a brief text explaining the town's spatial development.

Following this presentation of the basic data of the study, part two of the atlas presents a chronological analysis of the urbanization process in the Netherlands. It begins by providing a classification based on the origin, spatial development and landscape setting of the towns. This uses the maps, and timelines from part 1. This results in five urban categories: the oldest towns; second generation towns; the 'big three'; industrial towns; and residential towns. Then Dutch urban development is examined across four successive time periods so as to tease out common morphological factors and variations in urban planning practice. In these chapters chronologies are shown on a base map of the Netherlands. So, for example, in the first period, 1000–1500, it is immediately clear that location on a major waterway was a key factor in successful urban development. By 1350 the forms that constituted a flourishing town had been devised and most of the sample in this category (20 towns) expanded their plan area in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries as the Dutch economy flourished. Seven different plan forms are discerned and parcellation patterns in a sample of eight towns are presented. The two subsequent periods are 1500–1850, for which most of the analysis concentrates on the earlier part of the period, and 1850–1950, during which the improvements to the infrastructure of roads, railways and port facilities were critical in the revival of towns during industrialization. There are some fascinating reproductions of inter-war

planning maps in this section to illustrate what was still largely an era dominated by private planning and architectural practices. Finally, 1950–2010 encompasses a period of explosive growth and rapid outward expansion of urban areas. The maps illustrate how different some aspects of planning practice were in the Netherlands in this period compared with other European countries. There are indexes of places and people and a glossary of Dutch urban terminology.

Was all this effort worth it? The answer must be a resounding yes! Though there is a substantial historical, archaeological, planning and topographical literature that has endeavoured to analyse Dutch urbanism, the majority of it is in Dutch. An up-to-date summary of this literature, in English, is one major plus. Secondly, the atlas provides a way forward for the comparative use of the *European Historic Towns Atlas* series. After 50 years of atlas production there is little sign of scholars using

the atlases for comparative study, but here is an atlas which does precisely that. Thirdly, this atlas eschews a concentration on a short time period for its comparative analysis; its framework is nothing less than the *longue durée* of a 1000 years of Dutch urban history. Finally, it keeps rigorously to its carefully devised structure; no town is allowed to dominate; each is treated equally and the data that the atlas provides were available for all the towns in the cohort. This is a wonderful book and should be in the library of anyone concerned with the morphological history and development of European towns.

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