



BOOK REVIEWS

Figures infrastructures: an atlas of roads and railways by *Bieke Cattoor and Bruno de Meulder*, Uitgeverij Sun, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2011, 175 pp. ISBN 978-94-6105-1189.

This book is introduced by its authors as a 're-cartography of section E18-H16 of the Michelin roadmap n°533' (p. 4), which roughly includes the Belgian cities of Ghent, Kortrijk and Doornik. Through a large number of maps, photographs, reproductions of historical maps and accompanying text, the development of the infrastructure in parts of this area is unravelled. As explained in the prologue, the area taken from the Michelin map is 'recomposed into the format of a book and becomes an atlas' (p. 4). Eleven chapters represent eleven complex but well-designed maps that are constructed page by page by gradually building up the map to its full extent (p. 7).

As the title implies, *Figures infrastructures* focuses on infrastructural networks. Its intention is 'to reveal some of the structural relations and dynamic interactions between the different infrastructural lines' (p. 5). It does so by deconstructing and reconstructing the infrastructural lines of various types of roads, railways and, in a single case, power supply lines. The result is a series of maps that together form the topological atlas. The accompanying commentary mainly emphasizes the historical development of the infrastructural lines under consideration.

The atlas focuses on three sites that are situated within the original road map. First, the parallel infrastructures between Ghent and Kortrijk, consisting of a former military road, a national road, a railway line and a motorway, are considered in chronological order. Secondly, there is examination of the sideways movements within these infrastructures. Thirdly, there is consideration of the transversals across the Leie-Schelde inter-

fluvium.

The parallel infrastructures between Kortrijk and Ghent are represented as a space-time figure that shows that additions of lines through time were located at increasing distance from the River Leie. Deconstruction processes that occur on the infrastructural lines are, for example, the 'dissolving' of a country lane, the segmentation of a national road and the process of 'grid erosion' (p. 76), which is described as degradation of the fine-meshed fabric around the motorway.

The treatment of the second site, focusing on the sideways movements within the same group of infrastructures, deals with the smaller-scale infrastructures and the transversals within the site. The chapter examines the deconstruction of a transverse road into lines and the enlargement of the perimeter around a previously walled town by the addition of roads. It also reflects upon the way that evolving infrastructures affect the further layout and expansion of a village.

The study of the third site produces a cartographic variation of the figure of the 'double diptych' (p. 122). It explores the history of the formation of four national roads while focusing on different aspects that influence this formation, such as topography, road straightening and the construction of bypasses. It also examines road profiles, ranging from those perpendicular to the road, such as ribbon development, and in alignment with it, such as bridges.

The book culminates in eleven maps reproduced next to each other in the volume's epilogue. The authors have succeeded in revealing some of the structural relations and dynamic interactions between different infrastructural lines. At the same time they have developed a fresh cartographic approach. Perhaps the real significance of this publication lies within its cartographical exploration and expression. However, the inclusion of good legends would have helped the reader to relate

the map content to the accompanying texts. Historical maps are also printed in a very small format, which makes close investigation quite difficult.

The innovative cartographical design approach proposed reveals a number of interesting research questions pertinent for urban morphology that are not yet fully explored. The transformative processes of infrastructures described in this book, such as segmentation, straightening and dissolving, are touched upon but they are not viewed in a wider research perspective. Furthermore, relatively new terms such as 'band city' and 'grid erosion', are mentioned almost in passing but their introduction deserves further explanation. From the viewpoint of an urban morphologist it would be very interesting to explore these concepts, for example in the light of the Conzenian or Muratorian research traditions.

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Shaping the city: studies in history, theory and urban design edited by *Radolphe El-Khoury* and *Edward Robbins*, Routledge, London, 2013, 2nd edition, 362 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-58458-6.

The editors of this second edition of *Shaping the city* have invited fourteen contributors to reflect upon a range of urban issues and urban design approaches, as revealed in some fourteen cities and urban regions. Looking at different cities from different perspectives and in a variety of writing styles, the book illustrates the diversity and even the contradictions of urban design approaches rather than attempting a synthesis (p. 4). Similarly, though each city's distinctiveness, complexity, historical context and background are discussed, the essays do not aim to summarize the whole city-making experience, but to 'find in each city a lesson that demonstrates a particular way of reading the city and the consequent strategies that may be deployed in reshaping it' (p. 4). It is by the diversity of the said lessons that readers can gain insights and stimulating ideas applicable to other cities in the world that are not included in the discussion of the book. With the addition of cities such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Hong Kong, Oslo and

Shenzhen, about half of the cities featured in the second edition are located outside the USA, compared with one-quarter in the first edition.

Shaping the city offers a striking illustration of how normative planning ideas as well as local design and development processes combine in webs of relationships that are particularly complex to untangle. It points out the necessity to interpret the manifestations of planning and design ideas against the specific background of each city. Planners, designers and developers might adhere to imported ideas, but the ways in which these ideas are reinterpreted and adapted to the local context favours the emergence of home grown solutions and spatial arrangements. Every city has specific human made, social and natural environments. Each chapter shows, in its own way, how cities develop particular identities reflecting the ways in which local social and physical contexts are adjusting to different urban planning, design and development chronologies.

A case in point is offered by Chicago a city known for its archetypal qualities (Chapter 5). First, it seems to best represent American gridiron cities, in which urban subdivisions conform to the original orthogonal agricultural platting. Secondly, two types of superblock that are very common in the USA mark Chicago's development: the tower in the park and the garden city. A closer examination reveals more contrasting realities, anchored in the city's specific development history. Sarah Whiting develops the idea that the grid acts both as a background that is consistent enough to ensure legibility, while accommodating superblocks in the foreground that develop to satisfy evolving programmes, in such a way that 'each superblock offers its own mini urbanism – each construct its own version of a different kind of Chicago grid' (p. 86).

Charles Waldheim argues in Chapter 6 that in Detroit, the Motor City, urbanism came to echo Fordist industrial logic. As a consequence, the built environment becomes 'a temporary, ad hoc arrangement based on the momentary optimization of industrial production' (p. 96). In the late 1980s, following a survey of vacant land, Detroit urban planners produced a plan to decommission parts of the city. Waldheim suggests that the plan can be seen as an unimpassioned response to the most recent manifestation of an economic logic that had powerfully influenced the city's urban development for decades. In spite of the failing of the plan following public outcry, Detroit's fate had already been sealed, in accordance with the industrial logic applied to its development. And so was the fate of