

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

the industrial sectors of numerous other Western cities, though at a smaller and less spectacular scale. New Orleans's experience, pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina in 2005, displays similarities to Detroit. Victor J. Jones argues that from its foundation in 1718 as a French outpost, New Orleans has always been 'the site of a struggle between human intentions and the natural tendencies of the place' (Chapter 9, p. 170). Focusing on the response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster, Jones discusses three initiatives: 'shrinking the footprint', 'the Viet village urban farm,' and 'reinventing the waterfront'. Though intervening at different scales, each initiative is seen as an illustration of 'ecological urbanism'. The first proposed, in a top-down approach, to reshape and reduce the city's footprint by forbidding reconstruction on the most vulnerable land. But, as in the case of Detroit, citizens refused to accept the seemingly predictable outcome. The second initiative, which was capitalizing on the experience of a Vietnamese community was more successful. And so was the third, which proposed innovative solutions to restoring a natural shoreline. The second and third initiatives may have succeeded because they were more congruent with a local history of urban planning and design based on active and intensive transformation of the environment. The initiatives, however, suggest a new approach that pays greater respect to natural forces.

Built from the ground up as a new capital city, Brasilia is in many ways the epitome of modernist urbanism and civic architecture. Yet, in an account of the design and implementation of Lucio Costa's *Brasilia Pilot Plan*, Fares el-Dahdah finds that the essence of the design lies in the voids rather than in the buildings, making Brasilia a 'park city' (Chapter 4). Following the addition of Brasilia to UNESCO's World Heritage list, heritage preservation regulations established that – aside from a handful of civic buildings – only the buildings outlines, and hence the 'voids' that they delimit, would be protected. Most buildings could then be demolished in the future as long as the buildings replacing them were of the same volume. It is therefore 'the 'Pilot Plan' as 'park city' – rather than the city itself that is to ultimately survive' (p. 67). Again, this is an outcome that seems to contravene accepted wisdom and international heritage preservation practices, but that is congruent with the urbanism of Brasilia.

All chapters of the book, with one exception, focus on a specific city in order to highlight different urban issues and the local responses they have elicited. All stress that the desires, experience

and knowledge of planners and designers had to adapt to local social and material circumstances while being framed, enriched and sometimes constrained by the local collective experience. In the final chapter on New Urbanism, co-editor Edward Robbins explores the conceptual roots of that movement as well as its contribution to planning debates and to the renewal of urban development practices. Though New Urbanists strongly affirm their will to distance themselves from modernist planning principles, Robbins explains how, institutionally and operationally, New Urbanism resembles Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), including in the production and promotion of a 'Charter' that defines the core principles of each movement. Such approaches to urbanism as CIAM and New Urbanism are at odds with the multiplicity and richness of approaches illustrated in the previous chapters of the book, which might explain their limited success.

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Chinese urban design: the typomorphological approach by *Fei Chen* and *Kevin Thwaites*, Ashgate, Farnham, England, 2013, 244 pp. ISBN 978-1-4094-3388-0.

Authors Fei Chen and Kevin Thwaites contend that urban design can be seen as an endogenous concept firmly rooted in Chinese culture and tradition (p. 1). Although the study of urban form in China has existed for a long time, it has had only limited influence on recent Chinese urban design and planning. China is undergoing rapid urbanization and material transformation in parallel with impressive economic growth. This has been associated with the rapid destruction of traditional urban tissues, and a crisis in the cultural identity of cities. This crisis and some solutions to it are the main topics dealt with in this book.

To those concerned with the practice of Chinese urban design, Chen and Thwaites offer a new perspective and approach: typomorphology. The authors begin by briefly summarizing the studies of the characteristics and evolution of traditional Chinese urban form. Continuity, they argue, is a core concept in that evolution. Such a