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Shapers of urban form: explorations in morphological agency edited by *Peter J. Larkham* and *Michael P. Conzen*, Routledge New York, NY, USA, 2014, 335 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-73890-3.

Shapers of Urban Form was released just in time to be presented at the Twenty-First International Seminar on Urban Form held in Porto, Portugal in July 2014 as a surprise gift to Jeremy Whitehand, to whom the book is dedicated. In his foreword, Ivor Samuels retraces the contribution of Whitehand, an indefatigable researcher on the role of agency in morphological change, and a key observer as well as a major proponent of the field of urban morphology in his capacity as editor of this journal. Samuels points to two recurring themes in recent editorials signed by Whitehand. The first theme stresses the importance of intensifying research on the 'physiognomy of cities' as 'major embodiments of culture'. The second highlights the need for tighter links between research and practice, while emphasizing the necessity to understand *how* forms have arisen in order to decide how to better engage with the material city. Samuels states that this book is a major contribution to both these themes. It is easy to agree with him in particular as far as the first theme is concerned.

The editors solicited seventeen contributors from a variety of disciplinary and geographical horizons to reflect upon the 'making of the urban landscape,' by 'tracing the stories of development, identifying the agents and the agencies involved, and how they influence the outcomes in the urban landscape'. The book is divided into six parts, including an introduction by the editors that retraces the origins of studies on urban form and on the 'agents of morphological change' in particular, and a conclusion in the form of a theoretical exploration by Karl Kropf. The core sections present empirical research grouped by historical periods from the Middle Ages to our times. They are entitled: Agency in Pre-Modern Settings; Agency in Early Modern Settings; Agency in Industrial-Era Settings; and Agency in Late Modern and Postmodern Settings.

As emphasized by the editors, 'centuries of development have radically changed the cast of characters involved in the physical shaping of cities'. Yet, beyond the spectrum of historical circumstances and geographical contexts, the work offers a mosaic of approaches and themes, ranging from deeply empirically grounded interpretations to theoretical explorations, and from broad perspectives informed by political economy or sociology to approaches more focused on material transformations per se.

Karl Kropf finds in a case study of the expansion of the town of Leighton Buzzard, UK the pretext for a theoretical exploration of the mechanisms of collective learning that stem from the reciprocal interactions between various groups of agents (Chapter 17). Michaël Darin examines the underlying assumptions that led to conflicting interpretations of the nature and importance of Haussmann's input on Paris, before introducing a three-pronged methodological approach to better situate the contribution of singular agents in relation to the evolution of cities (Chapter 6).

The importance of the realities of political economy and of their associated models of governance for the evolution of urban form are examined in different contexts. Terry R. Slater's study of ecclesiastical precincts in European medieval towns illustrates for instance how the Church was counting on economic return generated by its urban development initiatives (Chapter 3). Anngret Simms explores the emergence of urban corporate governance in late-medieval Europe as a counterweight to the power of feudal lords (Chapter 4). The impacts on urban form of a change of colonial regime from Russian to American in a small Alaskan town are examined by M. P. Conzen (Chapter 7), whereas Marek Koter and Mariusz Kulesza look at the role played by industrialists in the provision of housing and urban amenities in remote towns of Poland (Chapter 9). Michael Pacione considers how social and residential differentiations are intertwined in the initial development and later evolution of a garden suburb of Glasgow, UK (Chapter 10).

The ways in which actors interact within networks elicit rich empirical and theoretical discussions. Keith D. Lilley's work highlights the complexities of the decision making process pertaining to the creation of new towns in medieval England and Wales under the rule of Edward I (Chapter 2). Katharine Arntz Thomas examines court towns and finds similarly a 'complex network of decision making and negotiation involving a large number of actors' at play in the production of these authoritarian urban landscapes (Chapter 5).

By studying initiatives taken by Birmingham, UK in an attempt by the city to reinvent itself physically and symbolically in the 1980s and 1990s, Tim Hall and Phil Hubbard try to understand the 'morphology' of a city network, 'as complex and contradictory as the landscapes it creates' (Chapter 16). They stress the need for developing a suitable actor network theory.

Local responses to technical requirements pertaining to the construction of railroad infrastructure are examined in Arthur J. Krim's study of Baltimore and Philadelphia in the USA, and Manchester and Liverpool in the UK (Chapter 8). Richard Harris documents the reality of the owner-builders of Peoria, Illinois in the mid-twentieth century, to conclude that land market as well as technical considerations, such as access to standardized house plans and materials, have gradually made self-built residential developments indistinguishable from comparable speculative developments (Chapter 11). Peter J. Larkham retraces the production of some 200 reconstruction plans at the apex of 'technocentric' planning in Britain after the Second Wold War, to show how technocratic rationality confronts local agency and dynamics (Chapter 13). John R. Gold is interested in the design of megastructures – the technical systems that worked as shared and extensible frameworks – as exemplified by the city centre of the new town of Cumbernauld, UK (Chapter 14).

In a study that relies both on classical town-plan analysis and the examination of the actions of local agents in two New Zealand port cities, Kai Gu shows how different social contexts and dynamics led to different spatial and physical outcomes (Chapter 15). Finally, in an attempt to study the impact of urban morphological theories and methods on the work of 'shapers of urban form', Nicola Marzot considers how morphological and typological 'readings' have influenced the work of architects such as Muratori, Rossi and Aymonino (Chapter 12).

What all the contributions to *Shapers of urban form* share, in spite of their diversity, is a common epistemological approach to the study of urban form. First, each piece seeks to produce new knowledge, though relying more or less intensively on empirical work. Secondly, while focusing on agency as well as on an array of social, technical and political-economic circumstances under which groups of agents have operated, the contributions all trace the portrait of *external conditions* that inform the morphogenesis of different places and times. In brief, they share a cognitive and externalist approach (Gauthier and Gilliland, 2006).

As such, they do not focus on the system of the built landscape per se, nor do they provide minute accounts of material transformations. Some readers, core morphologists, might still have appreciated more abundant illustrations of the built environments analysed. Yet by its scope and the quality of the research presented, this book is generous in a number of other ways. It is certainly a significant contribution to the understanding of cities in evolution.

Reference

Gauthier, P. and Gilliland, J. (2006) 'Mapping urban morphology: a classification scheme for interpreting the study of urban form', *Urban Morphology* 10, 41-50.

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Cities by design: the social life of urban form by *Fran Tonkiss*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2013, 204 pp. ISBN 978-0-7456-4897-2.

Tonkiss brings together for a scholarly audience a range of urban theories on the too often oversimplified physical, spatial, economic, cultural, political and social aspects of contemporary urbanization. She discusses seminal works and a range of more recent texts in a skillful historiography of contemporary urban thought, from Lynch to Jacobs, Beauregard to Koolhaas, Lefebvre to Latour, Appleyard to Mumford and more in a parade of views on city design. She repeatedly underlines the gaps between these theorists' points of view and makes connections between the multiple challenges of urban morphology more broadly. The book's primary contribution is to underscore and explore frameworks that have shaped an understanding of cities as social compositions.

Readers are challenged to consider urbanization through several disciplinary lenses, and a range of actors. It is evident from the first page that the contemporary city is not simply comprised of