



## BOOK REVIEWS

**Riga beyond the walls: the city's planned growth and transformation from the 17th century to the First World War** by *Irēna Bākule* and *Arnis Siksna*, Neputns, Riga, Latvia, 2009, 248 pp. ISBN 978-9984-807-36-2. Parallel texts in Latvian and English.

The Latvian capital Riga has been blessed with a little gem of its own: the book *Riga beyond the walls*. This book is special in the sense that the city's emergence, development and change is shown mainly by using maps and city plans. It describes not only the appearance and transformation of streets and blocks but discusses also new ideas related to town planning, and makes comparisons with the design of contemporary major European cities. The town layout was shaped by fortification requirements and other needs which affected the street layout, the size and shape of blocks, and their parcellation (subdivision into individual plots). Later the railways, additional types of buildings, and thereafter parks and avenues were introduced as city-forming elements.

*Riga beyond the walls* can be said to be a twin of the book *Landerierna i Göteborgs stadsbyggande* (Enhörning, 2006), which uses maps and city plans to show the Swedish city of Gothenburg's transformation and planned expansion over 300 years, from its foundation until the 1920s. As the subtitle reveals, *Riga beyond the walls* deals with the city's planned growth and transformation from the seventeenth century to the First World War. The city's extension beyond its core proceeded through successive, comprehensive plans – much like Gothenburg's.

The first chapter, '17th century urban development', considers Riga under Swedish rule. During much of this time Sweden was at war with Poland and Russia. The prime issue concerning Riga, as the authors note, was defence: building fortifications and the continuous redevelopment of

them. Of note too, a spontaneous development of suburbs took place, but no plan was composed for these until the 1650s when a suburban street network and fortifications outside the suburbs were introduced.

In the following chapter, '18th century urban development', Bākule and Siksna explain the impact of Russian rule upon Riga (lasting until 1917). Riga, we are told, was affected by the Great Northern War, which severely damaged its fortifications, buildings and suburbs, and then by a plague. Rebuilding of the city and suburbs took 50 years. A wide, clear defensive area beyond the fortifications, a so-called esplanade, was established. In the first half of the eighteenth century a large number of regularly planned gardens, perhaps associated with small summer houses, were created. As many of the suburban lots were quite large, much of the suburban area was characterized by houses set in gardens and greenery (pp. 99-100).

The third chapter deals with urban development in the first half of the nineteenth century. It draws attention to the suburbs being destroyed by fire in 1812, and their redevelopment: a fan-shaped street network and new public squares were built. Tree-lined walkways, *allées*, connected the suburbs with the city core, a public park was established, and for the first time the influence of the railway could be felt in the city.

In the fourth chapter, on 'Urban development in the second half of the 19th century', analysis of the industrial revolution and population increase are described. The historic fortifications were torn down – considerably later than in many other European cities – and a plan was made by J. D. Felsko (in co-operation with O. Dietze) in accord with modern European ideals. This plan (of 1857) was very progressive for its time and shows parallels with the first plan of Gothenburg (1866), which was the first plan in Sweden to emanate from a public town planning competition. Both plans

tried to fulfil modern ideals regarding park belts, boulevards, round-points ('star places'), *allées*, villa developments, and public buildings. Unfortunately the Felsko plan in Riga was revised and simplified. However, Felsko was City architect over a long period, so many of his intentions were realized.

The final chapter, on the morphology of building types, focuses on what is today Old Riga. Just as in Gothenburg and a number of other cities, all buildings in the area had to be made of wood in case the city was attacked and structures had to be destroyed in the face of the enemy. Later, new buildings, often stone-built ones, were erected. In the eighteenth century the wealthy inhabitants of the inner city wanted to take advantage of the possibilities of suburban life, since life inside the fortifications was unhealthy: 'people wished to build small out-of-town residences in the environs of Riga, placed within extensive gardens and reached via long avenues. These residences developed as assemblages of buildings around small mansions' (p. 195). After the fire of 1812 the suburbs were rebuilt using 'model façades' (approved by Russia). New building regulations came, and there was a rapid change in the suburbs as both density and number of storeys increased. The status of the area changed too. The transformation of the former territory of the fortifications and esplanade into the urban centre became complete during the 1880s.

*Riga beyond the walls* is attractively designed and has a very convenient format. It is richly illustrated with 98 pictures, many of these in colour. The quality of the illustrations is, on the whole, exceptionally good, but sometimes an original was not in good condition, like the Felsko/Dietze plan (pp. 152-3). Sometimes too the digitization of plans is unsatisfactory – for example that of the city plan of 1770 (pp. 84-5). This is a book for those who admire old maps and buildings. It benefits greatly from a remarkable bringing together of archive material, not only from Latvia but also Russia and Sweden. With parallel texts in Latvian and English, this work will surely be acknowledged not only by Latvians, especially citizens of Riga, but by a wider group of international scholars and discerning heritage tourists.

## Reference

- Enhörning, G. (2006) *Landerierna i Göteborgs stadsbyggande* (Chalmers tekniska högskola, Göteborg, Sweden).

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**Building globalization: transnational architecture production in urban China** by Xuefei Ren, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, USA, 2011, 218 pp. ISBN 978-0-226-70981-9.

*Building globalization* is a timely contribution to the study of urban China under the influence of globalization and urbanization at an unprecedented scale. The intention of the book is to 'understand the rationales and logics underlying the search for international architects among China's urban elites' and 'the role of transnational architectural production in making global cities' (p. 14). The sociological approach adopted enriches and complements current literature on Chinese urbanism, which concentrates largely on economic, institutional and morphological transformation. Architectural production is a unique lens through which the embedded social network and power relation of various actors are revealed in three urban projects in China's major global cities Beijing and Shanghai. Based on intensive field research and interviews, Ren documents SOHU projects, funded by a private developer in Beijing; Xintiandi, a property-led urban regeneration in Shanghai; and the National Olympic Stadium. She carefully analyses the initiatives, strategies, and interactions among five groups of social actors, namely domestic entrepreneurs, property owners, state bureaucrats, foreign investors, and globally mobile cultural elites, in the process of producing state-of-the-art architecture in contemporary Chinese cities.

The main argument of the book focuses on the accumulation and conversion of political, financial, and symbolic capital by and among those major actors of the projects through their complex, conflicting, and dynamic social relations. The understanding of space goes beyond the physical containers of human activities to uncover the strategic terrain of capital accumulation. In this way Ren's interpretation of the Chinese cases adds valuable insights to the present study of globalization and a continental-scale neo-liberal trend. The Chinese examples demonstrate that architecture and its prestigious designers are