

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

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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

commonly employed for place branding and commodification, a phenomenon observed worldwide and powered by hypercapitalism. While similar social issues, such as gentrification and stratification, are observed in China, the Chinese pursuit of globalization differs from its Western counterparts owing to the particular power geography in current society, as Ren vividly explains. A comparative perspective is often offered in the three case studies to clarify similarities and differences of various social phenomena in the Chinese and Western contexts. At the end, it is suggested that the current spatial strategies in Chinese cities produce 'vast discontent and inequality' (p. 177). For audiences who are interested in postmodern urbanism, post-industrial regeneration and globalization, this book provides important local insights that are relevant to the study of the global urban future.

*Building globalization* pays attention to the searching for national identity by China's urban elites and the state party in the global context at a critical moment of history. It reminds Chinese citizens of a similar attempt pursued by the first generation of Chinese architects and social elites under passive Western influences in the early-twentieth century (Esherick, 1999). The question of what is Chinese has always been controversial and changeable. In relation to the current debate, the idea of Critical Architecture is reintroduced, which should challenge current ideology and social injustice in China. For an architectural audience, Ren poses an essential concern for the social responsibility of the profession in the market-driven environment. National identity does not only lie in the image representation of architecture, but also in socially responsive spaces that support the wellbeing of all social classes. The debate on eye-catching shapes or 'traditional skins' of architecture is rather superficial. More consideration needs to be given to the social dimension. This point of view echoes Cuthbert's (2007) claim that the design profession should engage with solid theory, linking sociology, geography, and economics for instance, so that urban form, meaning, and function are embraced in design as well as context. In this respect, for decision-makers, the choice over domestic or reputable international architects should not be driven by either conservative nationalism or global liberalism, but by creating socially sustainable spaces for Chinese citizens.

From the urban design point of view, current practices by the new generation of Chinese architects and planners are sophisticated in the generation of forms, but lack understanding of the

social foundations. This book offers good practice that potentially has wide applicability to help tackle issues of social sustainability in design processes. However, this advantage is limited, since the book is structured in terms of individual urban projects and lacks a consistent conceptual framework to map complex social relations. Ideas are introduced and independent arguments are stated regarding each project, which weakens the main argument and is an obstacle to further exploration. Furthermore, the book does not discuss how architectural images of the three projects are deliberately created and remotely consumed through the media by world consumers, thus failing to strengthen the idea of the symbolic power of architecture.

## References

- Cuthbert, A. R. (2007) 'Urban design: requiem for an era – review and critique of the last 50 years', *Urban Design International* 12, 177-223.
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**Dominion geometries: colonial construction and postcolonial persistence of the 'imperial' in the New Delhi Plan** by *Anubhav Gupta*, VDM Verlag Dr. Muller Aktiengesellschaft, Saarbrücken, Germany, 2011, 136 pp. ISBN 978-3-639328-95-0.

This is a considerably slimmer volume than most that reach a scholarly bookshelf today, and leaves us wishing for more. Few observers, scholarly or otherwise, of New Delhi's planning and civic shortcomings would disagree with the title and hypothesis of Gupta's work. It is a praiseworthy effort, seeking to go beyond existing scholarship to examine in detail various spatial issues associated with British imperialism and its post-colonial Indian context, both in terms of design and meaning. But much more remains to be done.

Early on, Anubhav Gupta quotes the descriptions of Delhi by two of its most famous residents, Mirza Ghalib and Khushwant Singh (p. 33). Their contrasting views serve as bookends to