

Guangzhou, not Hong Kong, that *really* serves the PRD?

A number of chapters in this book, such as those touched on in this review, are valuable contributions. It is primarily as a collection of individual essays, rather than as a coherent volume, that *Planning Asian cities* is worth reading.

Jieming Zhu, Department of Real Estate, University Scholars Programme, National University of Singapore, 4 Architecture Drive, Singapore. E-mail: jmzhu@hotmail.com

English Garden Cities: an introduction by Mervyn Miller, English Heritage, Swindon, UK, 2010, 96 pp. ISBN 978-1-84802-051-1.

This volume, produced by English Heritage as part of its series on informed conservation, provides a thorough guide to the origins of the Garden City movement and its evolution. Produced for a general rather than an academic audience, it breaks little new ground, but its high quality photographs and graphics, both contemporary and historical, illuminate the subject and underscore the importance of protecting from overdevelopment the surviving physical remnants of this landmark tradition.

The origins of the Garden City movement are well known, not the least through Mervyn Miller's own extensive writing on the subject. Ebenezer Howard's concept for melding innovative design with a utopian vision for alleviating urban poverty sparked a movement which resulted initially in three pioneer communities in England – Letchworth, Hampstead Garden Suburb, and Welwyn Garden City – as well as a few imitations in the United States. By limiting the size of each new community to no more than 30 000 people, and surrounding the built core with a green belt, Howard hoped to provide an alternative environment to urban slums by assuring healthy living and strong community ties at an affordable price. The marriage of the best of city and country living, he believed, would provide a radically different lifestyle from which would 'spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilization'. Through working within a capitalist system, Howard expected that by limiting the return to investors, he could use excess profits both to finance community facilities and to keep rents low.

Howard's vision was more fully realized in physical development than in social reform, and it

is not surprising given the sponsorship of the book that Miller concentrates on the built environment. Much of the book traces the precedents for the Garden City in the Arts and Crafts movement, company town planning, and the development of the Garden City Association's three completed towns. Each town is fully described and its origin illustrated, and there are separate chapters on homes and factory buildings. Here, readers literally see the primary work of the great architects involved in the effort, including most formidably Howard's close associates Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, as well as Lutyens and de Soissons, among others. The narrative sometimes declines into cataloguing buildings and associated sites, such as parks and gardens, but the illustrations, many of them of stunning beauty, bring home the quality of the workmanship. A final chapter on threats to this legacy gives the book a sense of immediacy not otherwise suggested by its coffee-table qualities. Miller describes a number of conservation tools currently employed, including designation as conservation areas and leasehold controls. Nevertheless, Miller reports that Garden Cities remain vulnerable to development, including inappropriate design for building additions as well as the introduction of incompatible new structures. Noting that the importance of Garden Cities lies in 'the integrity of the whole designed landscape', he believes that there 'is a clear danger that they will lose the precious features which make them attractive places to live and work' (p. 96).

As much as the original Garden City examples predominate, Miller's book also provides a useful history of the movement's evolution, including the incorporation of Howard's ideas in English national planning policy. As a result, variations on Howard's ideas appeared in full or in part in a number of forms throughout the twentieth century. A useful gazetteer at the end of the book lists the major Garden City sites by region. The results were mixed. Most intriguing is Wythenshawe. Produced in response to the 1919 housing act adopting Garden City standards for government-subsidized local authority housing, Wythenshawe incorporated Howard's social ideal by attempting to provide an alternative living environment for Manchester's inner city residents. Miller carefully details the ways the new community met or deviated from Barry Parker's design, concluding that it represented only partial realization of Howard's vision for a new civilization. Yet because he focuses on the physical environment at the expense of recounting social history, Miller in his Wythenshawe example, as well as elsewhere in

the book, neglects to fully explore the heart of Howard's intent: to make better citizens through the provision of an aesthetically pleasing and well planned environment. Because Garden City areas are well designed, they tend to rise in value, thereby excluding many of the less wealthy clients for which Howard intended them. In their success, perhaps, such areas have changed into closed communities without gates, thereby reducing their intended effect of alleviating urban poverty. If Miller is right in saying that affluence, in the form of buyers who want to remake their homes, is the biggest danger to the protection of these areas, what of the lost legacy that was intended to assure common benefits to residents of limited wealth?

In fairness, this was not the subject Miller was commissioned to address. In promoting the protection of a whole environment, however, one would hope that social as well as physical considerations would be valued. Howard would have expected no less.

Howard Gillette Jr., Department of History, Rutgers University, 429 Cooper Street, Camden, NJ 08102 USA. E-mail: hfg@camden.rutgers.edu

Spacematrix: space, density and urban form by *Meta Berghauser Pont* and *Per Haupt*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 2010, 280 pp. ISBN 978-90-5662-742-3.

Spacematrix explores the potential of urban density as a tool for urban planning and design. The authors' fascination with density is not primarily normative, making no claim to know which density is best, but is driven by the desire to understand the relational logic between density, urban form and performance. This is a prerequisite for understanding and successfully predicting the effects of specific designs and planning proposals. The focus of attention is the relationship between types of urban environment and data such as amount, size, physical properties and economic values.

The text presents a clear investigation of the highly articulated and currently important issue of urban space, with a particular focus on relations and the possible declensions that can be developed between building/urban density and the urban form of the city as the spatial result of the act of design. The various chapters examine the concepts of density, urban development/land consumption, the concept of spacematrix as a multi-variable density, as well as the potential, quality, and performance of

variable density, in the end exploring a number of design case studies as practical examples. It is worthwhile underlining how the cultural approach and the organization of the text continually highlight the dialectic relationship between the elements of which the city is composed. This ensures that there is no loss of the central objective of the study being conducted: in other words the investigation of the possible relation between density and urban morphology. It is almost as if the question underlying the text is precisely that of verifying/investigating the possibility of determining the form of the city, beginning with the very concept of density, its value, and the relations established between spatial values and density itself.

Spacematrix proposes an appropriate methodology that, by exploiting an objective tool of measurement, in this case density, can be applied both during the phase of analysis as well as at the moment of design. This twofold validity is derived from the fact that studying urban density means returning to dealing with space/dimensions; in other words the necessary and indispensable act prior to any action of design or planning. This treatise is supported and integrated by significant historical retrospectives and specific references to urban planning theories from the European and extra-European panorama, as revealed in the second chapter. The theme dealt with highlights the importance of the interrelation between the scales of design, focusing attention on the relationship between the building and urban design. In this manner the investigation explores the option of recovering the possibility/modality of realizing an integrated scenario of relations between the building, urban context/design and urban landscaping design precisely because the examination of density can be utilized in diverse contexts of territorial phenomena, thus allowing for its interdisciplinary use as a tool of dialogue.

Density becomes a variable to be utilized transversally, initially to understand and later to resolve the complexity of the problems of the contemporary city, in which diverse activities, necessities, and social classes coexist and share the same spaces: these thus become an important element in the construction of recognizable urban scenarios, as the expression of diffuse urban quality. Density is transformed, as a result, into an urban variable capable of defining the current form of the city, developing into a tool for reading, measuring and designing, as well as controlling in the case of urban sprawl. The study made by Berghauser Pont and Haupt is used to open up new