

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.

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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

disciplinary horizons within the field of study of urban density and space syntax, in addition to new operative paths within the approach to designing the city: an approach that provides a tool of investigation and design that can be defined to match different urban situations. The investigation is clearly explained in the form of a chart of possible solutions to diverse scales of design, marking an opening towards new ways of investigating and designing the city. It almost resembles a return to a model-based approach, though with a greater freedom of action resulting precisely from the use of density as a parameter of calculation. This allows the prefiguration of the possible configurations of the city, beginning precisely with the context in which one operates – imagining quantitative as well as typological, morphological, and spatial aspects.

Berghauser Pont and Haupt demystify the use of image-based references and concepts such as ‘urbanity’ by challenging the reliability of such

concepts, and critically examining the possibility of redefining them through the concept of density. Equipped with a structural understanding of the nature of urban density, the skills needed by architects and planners in their daily trade-offs between quantitative requirements, physical constraints and qualitative preferences are then expanded upon. This should also empower such professionals in their collaboration and confrontation with economists, engineers and politicians. *Spacematrix* is of interest to architects as well as urban planners and designers, but is equally relevant to other professionals working in the field of urbanism, such as developers, economists, engineers, and policy makers.

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ISUF Task Force on Research and Practice

The President of ISUF has constituted a task force to report on how research and practice in urban morphology can be more effectively integrated. Although there are a number of references to practice in this journal it would be helpful to the members of the Task Force to know of other cases.

These could include examples where aspects of an urban morphological approach in the widest sense have been integrated with other methods and could include *inter alia* conservation area studies, masterplans, local plans, detailed plans, design projects and implementations, urban design

frameworks, codes and guides. The applications and terminology will of course vary according to the local context and legislation.

It would be particularly helpful to the Task Force to learn of cases where applications have been evaluated for their efficacy and of ISUF members' experience of cases in which attempts to integrate research and practice have been unsuccessful and the reasons for failure.

Information should be sent to the Chair of the Task Force, Ivor Samuels, at ivor.samuels@googlemail.com

Teaching urban morphology: call for papers

ISUF has considered issues of how urban morphology is taught on several occasions, but the most recent was at its conference in Trani in 2003. At that time it was a concern that a survey showed that much of what was taught under this term focused on the Chicago School's zone models and their derivatives. Since then, not only have ideas developed, but new resources, including high-quality digital mapping, and the technology to manipulate data have become much more readily available. Yet has there been any significant

development in how morphology is taught, both in professional courses and more widely?

A theme session on ‘teaching urban morphology’ is planned for the ISUF conference in Delft, 17-20 October 2012. We urge readers to submit papers (see p. 26 of this issue), and to present their teaching resources. The session will be convened by Vítor Oliveira (E-mail: vitorm@fe.up.pt) and Peter J. Larkham (E-mail: peter.larkham@bcu.ac.uk).
