

Yet the objective quality of *Rappresentare la città* connects the individual sources to each other and in so doing provides a persuasive argument for the iconographic canon. However, unfortunately, historical town maps, at least in orthogonal projection, are now few and far between. Folin points out that this is an outcome of *iconographies*. Once conceived as practical tools being perceived, ironically they became of limited use over time: their utility, and therefore the justification for their conservation, ultimately became eroded when the circumstances that governed their drawing up changed. Of course there are some exceptions, as the examples gathered in this volume testify, but on the whole in the first Modern Age of Italy the idea of an intrinsic and complete survey of urban areas was not widely considered or valued. Folin concludes that 'the small number of towns *iconographies* is the result of a political culture not conceiving the use of power as an unitary and consistent government of a precise territory, but on the contrary as the mediation action between autonomous and heterogeneous bodies (mostly bent on self-governing), with whom the King or the Prince had a special relationship based on the circumstances' (p. 30).

References

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Urban housing handbook by Eric Firley and Caroline Stahl, Wiley, Chichester, UK, 2009, 328 pp. ISBN 978-0-4705-1275-3.

Some books look very promising due to their ambitious titles and glossy covers. Others are more modest. Yet when one begins to read, doors of information open. In some instances the book opens itself up in such a manner that the reader is rapidly sensitive to the author's accomplishments. The *Urban housing handbook* is this kind of book.

The book covers the study of 30 housing types in major cities built during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when urbanization was progressively taking place. It does not attempt to study the history of architecture per se but rather the configuration of living spaces related to history, particularly when the rapid expansion of cities was taking place and 'framing' built environments. To be more precise, the book puts forward knowledge embedded in different social, cultural, and economic contexts relating to the relationship between architecture and the urban fabric. Based on this understanding of the historical context, the relationship is classified by type, both graphically and analytically.

The combination of the traditional and new eye-catching contemporary architectural examples, and linkages to buildings in different cultures around the world, makes the book unique. It not only casts light on the traditional debate between historical architecture conservation and contemporary architectural innovation but almost gives a clear answer that the co-existence and complementarity of two extremes are possible, and as such can lead cities to a better future. This book will no doubt remind the reader of Herman Hertzberger's *Lessons for students in architecture*, yet compared with Hertzberger's efforts Firley and Stahl's book is more pleasing and convincing in its extensive analysis of both ordinary and signature buildings in a wider global context.

As an architect and teacher in an architectural school, I should like to add a few more points from a professional and academic point of view. There is a lack of serious study of world architecture and a proper presentation of it. The concept behind this book seems to allow architecture of different economic backgrounds to be appreciated on the same platform. For me, it is a criticism of globalism that it is now dominating market and political powers, and identified through landmark buildings being erected everywhere in developing countries – edifices normally designed by a handful of Western architects. In contrast, the case analyses

in this book are based on contextual understanding. The focus of each case is not limited by a single plot but enriched by the urban fabrics covering the complexity of the spatial structure, and characterized by both the analysis and graphics highlighting the relationship between a single building and the wider urban structure. The book bridges scientific research on one side and architectural aesthetics on the other.

Issues relating to conservation and development and historical and contemporary approaches are presented side by side. The contemporary examples selected by the authors are not simply a repetition of the traditional, but are clearly linked through typological analysis. Although the quality of the urban fabrics and housing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are featured, the authors seem to suggest that innovation in the design of individual architects is inevitable in contemporary society.

The authors did not intend to provide a particular argument or thesis but rather allow readers to draw their own conclusions by discovering the message in the text, graphics, and composition of the book. Each essay focusing on a particular architectural case can be read as an independent piece as well as a comparative part related to the others. The analysis is balanced with graphics, which are selective, well reproduced, and carefully arranged in the book. Architectural drawings, plans, sections, photographs, aerial views, and archive material are all used. Importantly, the book will appeal to different audiences who want to discover more. This is certainly consistent with the objective of the authors, who state that the book is written for a variety of audiences, academicians, architects, urban designers, and even private aficionados from a wide range of professions associated with the building industry.

There are, however, weaknesses in the book that are worthy of mention. From an academic point of view, the methodology based on types seems more an organizational tool in compiling the selected cases rather than driven by the need for deeper research on the interrelationships of varieties of urban fabric. Apparently a high level of analysis in research is not the main objective in the writing of this book. Another impression left by the pairing of traditional and contemporary examples is that the pairs remain 'apart' except in the similarity in the type of floor plan. The analytical framework based on urban fabric (as applied to traditional houses) seems to contradict or was not applied to the representation of contemporary examples, which seem to be isolated pieces of works by designers

without clear strategies. Some of the sectional drawings and plans of the historical buildings are not precise and do not reveal the structural and material properties, which are observable in the drawings from contemporary examples.

Finally, it is helpful to refer to the bibliography which shows the concepts, thinking, and methodology of several writers. The classical and most prominent works on urban history are found here. They include the works of Spiro Kostof, the core writings of Gianfranco Caniggia and Gian Luigi Maffei from a typological school in Italy, and the book, *Über Wohnbau / House-ing* by the influential contemporary architectural office, Baumschlager Eberle.

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Great public squares: an architect's selection by Robert F. Gatje, W.W. Norton, London, England, 2010, 224 pp. ISBN 978-0-393-73173-6.

Great public squares is a study of 40 urban spaces in Europe and North America. Considering environments formed in both the pre-industrial and industrial eras, it seeks to build upon 'three great books about urban space' (p. 9), namely *Der Städtebau* by Camillo Sitte (published in 1889), *The American Vitruvius* by Werner Hegemann and Elbert Peets (published in 1922), and Paul Zucker's *Town and square* (published in 1959). To achieve this lofty goal Robert Gatje considers matters of utility, integrity, and delight (p. 11), namely standards for judging spatial design established by the Roman architect Vitruvius, so as to determine the qualities of urban spaces in the Western world.

In selecting his case studies Gatje employs simple criteria: they are all in use today, are admired, and are well-known. This therefore excludes many of Europe's 'great spaces', such as the forums of Rome, and the agoras of Ancient Greece. Nevertheless an ample assortment of urban spaces is included. Although some of the cases discussed have been hitherto written about on a great many occasions – for example, St Mark's Square in Venice (Italy), Place Stanislas in Nancy (France), and the Circus in Bath (UK) – what is apparent about Gatje's approach to investigating