

urban space is his intention 'to provoke and enhance your judgement of urban spaces by comparing one with another so that they can be enjoyed, appreciated, and preserved' (p. 13).

So that people can augment their knowledge of urban spaces Gatje relies heavily upon two features: first, visual sources, including coloured maps (at 1:1000 scale) and photographs – of which there are 300 in the book; secondly, the provision of numerous short written texts containing details of the historical background, design influences, and design meaning of spaces, in addition to presenting statistical data often lacking in similar publications – for example, plan dimensions, the maximum height of surrounding buildings, and the ratio of height to width and area. The clarity of the illustrations is outstanding. This combined with the quality of the writing provides readers, especially students of urban design, with the opportunity to grasp the origins, form, and meaning of urban spaces, and the elements that make them work successfully.

Critics might suggest that *Great public squares* is yet another work that adds to the already bloated corpus of literature on international and historical urban design. However, as Gatje, emphasizes in the opening pages of his book, it is a means to record his lifelong vocational observation of urban space, a surveillance and analysis borne from practising as an architect. With experience in Marcel Breuer's and Richard Meier's office, and educated by renowned US urbanist John Reys, Gatje puts forward a distinctive assessment of the form, furnishing, entry/exit points, and enclosure of urban spaces. Whilst he examines the nature of many spaces that could be classified as the 'greats' of urban history and its development, he also seeks to understand the form of 'near great' spaces – for example, the Piece Hall in Halifax, UK, and Old Town Square in Telč, Czech Republic. Yet it is the selection of spaces such as the Piece Hall that can be criticized. Arguably there are better choices, for example the Frederiksgade in Copenhagen, the Plaza Mayor in Madrid, and Chamberlain Square in Birmingham. However, the choices of case studies are well-explained. Thus with regard to the Piece Hall in Halifax, what other industrial-age urban spaces exist within Britain on the model of the ideal piazza design as suggested by great Renaissance men such as Leon Battista Alberti and Andrea Palladio?

Though a great deal of literature already exists on urban spaces, in terms of the illustrations provided, few books published this year on any element of urban studies will match the quality of

those in this book. Both text and pictures give students a new opportunity to comprehend the design of what Gatje calls, the 'outside rooms' of civilization. Ultimately, does *Great public squares* build upon the works of Sitte, Hegemann and Peets, and Zucker? Maybe not, but it is a valiant attempt to do so.

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**O concurso de Brasília: sete projetos para uma capital** by Milton Braga, Cosac Naify, São Paulo, Brazil, 2010, 292pp. ISBN 978-85-7503-896-3.

Celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Brasília, Brazil's capital city, *O concurso de Brasília: sete projetos para uma capital* analyses the seven successful entries in the 1956 national competition for the commissioning of the settlement's layout. Lucio Costa (first prize), Boruch Milman and his team (second prize), Rino Levi and his team and the Roberto brothers' team (joint third prize), Henrique Mindlin and Giancarlo Pianti, Vilanova Artigas' team and architect Milton Ghiraldini and his team (joint fifth prize) designed the successful entries. These are shown in the book to feature common general principles: the urban ground as public property, functional city-zoning, the creation of neighbourhood units and super blocks, the diversion of traffic into specialized roads – leading to a separation of pedestrians and motorways and the removal of the traditional street – and dense geometric rational urban forms dispersed as a park-city. As modern architecture was fairly widespread in Brazil at that time, and the impact of *Charte d'Athènes* urbanism was becoming all the more apparent, the compilation of the awarded entries depicts how Brazilian architects and engineers translated modernist ideas into inventive urban forms. Other possible Brasília's are thus unveiled in this book.

While largely ignoring the controversy that surrounded the results of the competition (for jury member Oscar Niemeyer and first-award-winner Lucio Costa had had previous close professional associations), the book endorses the decision of the jury, for whom the new capital should be a 'functional city' and have 'its own architectural expression'. Indeed, Costa's entry, despite its poor

presentation, clearly rendered an artistic, singular, and easily-read form for a modern capital city that was absolutely shaped by the site, thereby making the other proposals seem like mere illustrative diagrams of general urbanistic theories. Costa was Le Corbusier's personal friend, and seems to have adopted the French architect's design strategy of 'interpretative form giving' (Neumeyer, 1991, p. 92) in order to shape the new city, designed as a complete entity, an ideal object.

*O concurso de Brasília* was originally written in 1999 as an academic dissertation for a Master's degree at the University of São Paulo, where the author teaches building design at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism. Milton Braga is himself a successful architect who has collaborated with Paulo Mendes da Rocha, the 2006 Pritzker Architecture Prize winner. This published version of Braga's dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part simply reproduces the competition call for entries and describes each of the seven awarded submissions, all of them immediately followed by the jury's comments. The second part compares the different proposals and contrasts the award-winning layout with the city that was actually built. Biographical details of the competitors, as well as of the jury members, are provided in an appendix, not only revealing their professional backgrounds but also aiding understanding of the context of the competition.

Richly illustrated, the book includes original sketches, models and plans scattered in various public and private archives. It also displays recent photographs of Brasília taken by the photographer and architect Nelson Kon, renowned for his astonishing snapshots of Brazilian modernist architecture. Kon's pictures reveal a contrasting city, different from that of the familiar postcards and monuments. They feature bucolic townscapes, where six-storey slabs are orthogonally placed on dense green open public ground, isolated pedestrian paths and desolate six-lane roads – once the pride of the industrial society – vast public squares, colossal lawns upon which Niemeyer's grand sculptural buildings rely for artistic effect, and massive, miserable, crowded open-air car parks nearby. Kon's raw pictures of Brasília seem to state that modernism also made mistakes.

*O concurso de Brasília* offers an important contribution to the international history of modern town planning. It depicts the diffusion of international principles and their local construction. Also, in the national context, the book endorses the synergic collaboration of State and the Modern Movement in Brazil in order to build an image of a

modern country. The mere shift of the capital city and the awarded entries' near consensual adherence to modernist principles of architecture and urbanism not only signalled industrial, social and technological development, but also the national desire to play a significant role in the modern world. In spite of living in times of environmental concern, and despite the fact that the paradigms that built different Brasília's are now long gone, the publishing of pictures of Brazil's new capital city, along with the competition entries, does expose the spirit of the era, the modernist ambition and the urbanistic knowledge accumulated during its subsequent crisis.

## Reference

Neumeyer, F. (1991) *The artless word: Mies van der Rohe on the building art* (MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.).

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**Hungarian atlas of historic towns (Magyar várostörténeti atlasz), No. 1 Sopron** by Ferenc Jankó, József Kücsán and Katalin Szende, with contributions by Ferenc Dávid, Károly Goda and Melinda Kiss, Sopron, Hungary, 2010, 86 pp. ISBN 978-963-8327-32-1.

This volume on Sopron, a west Hungarian town situated near the present-day border with Austria, must be regarded as a major achievement. First of all, the atlas makes a substantial contribution to research on Sopron's historical geography. Moreover, with its wealth of material – an extensive collection of maps accompanied by a booklet and a CD-ROM – it provides a solid basis for further studies of the town. Most importantly, however, as the opening issue of a new book series, *The Hungarian atlas of historic towns*, it is the first Hungarian contribution to an all-European effort of providing cartographic sources for comparative studies on urban form co-ordinated by the International Commission for the History of Towns (ICHT).