



BOOK REVIEWS

Cities after the fall of Communism: reshaping cultural landscapes and European identity edited by *Jon Czaplicka, Nida Gelazis and Blair Ruble*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, USA, 2009, 368 pp. ISBN 978-0-8018-9191-5.

The end of East European communism in 1989, arguably the most important geo-political event of the late-twentieth century, converted cities in the region into laboratories of socio-spatial change. Twenty years later, this change remains crudely understood; hence, the persistence of the rather vague term ‘transitional city’. One key reason for the continuous misunderstanding of contemporary East European urbanism may well be that scholarship on the subject has been heavily dominated by the political economy approach, to the neglect of ‘softer’, humanist-driven interpretations. In this sense, *Cities after the fall of Communism* presents a laudable attempt to complement the literature by adding an important analytical variable explaining urban change in the region – that of culture.

The book is edited masterfully. The ambitious research approach of the editors is succinctly summarized in Strauss’s famous question: ‘What time is this space?’ The editors propose that urban transformation in the post-communist period is at least partially the product of cultural identity recreation that seeks to find a desirable past and thus position cities in the region for a desirable European future. This thesis holds together the wide variety of individual case studies chosen from central and north-eastern Europe: Vilnius, Novgorod, Wrocław, Tallinn, Odessa, Sevastopol, Kaliningrad, Kharkiv, Lviv, Łódź and Szczecin. The details of the cases vary immensely: for example, whereas in some cases a Russian / Soviet identity is celebrated, in most it appears to be vehemently rejected. Still, the fundamentals of the

story – heart-wrenching searches for the most flattering past (among several other, more grim ones marked by oppression and ethnic extinctions) and their representation in space, whether achieved by changing street names, demolishing old monuments or erecting new ones – are omnipresent. Having in mind that most of the cities discussed in the volume have been nodes of perpetual ethnic and national rivalry, their latest urban revamping seems to be part of a perennial story of spatial change as a tool of identity reclamation. In this sense, the story is the perfect post-Soviet illustration of an old Soviet joke about the communist regime’s enviable ability to erase the past. It is easy to predict the future, the joke went; it is the past that is harder to predict – it always keeps changing.

The book is organized in three parts: ‘European cities old and new: re-creating medieval histories’ (Vilnius, Novgorod, Wrocław); ‘Architecture and history at ports of entry’ (Tallinn, Odessa, Sevastopol); and ‘Cities at a new east-west border’ (Kharkiv, Łódź, Szczecin). This division works well because it is both geographical and conceptual. The common theme of urban change as a mighty weapon of cultural change should not obscure the fact that all cities discussed in the book seem to have found different and unique ways of coping with it.

An interesting story is presented of Wrocław (once known as Breslau), a city in Poland. Seeking to sidestep thorny issues of Polish versus German identity (the city has at different points of history been part of Austria, Bavaria and Prussia, but its German population was expelled after the Second World War and the German legacy was purposefully suppressed), Wrocław has found a creative way of avoiding the debate entirely. In reshaping its urban fabric, it has sought simultaneously to celebrate its medieval, pre-nation-state heritage and its latest, post-nation-state European Union identity. At the other end of the

spectrum, the Russian city of Novgorod has sought to revamp its local, unique, city-based identity, both underplaying its status as a quintessential ethno-national centre and proposing a new, locally-inspired notion of Russian identity.

In the concluding chapter, the editors claim that the fall of communism has been ultimately a triumph of the nation-state (p. 336), obviously referring to the post-1989 disintegration of multi-ethnic federations and their replacement by 'ethnically clean' republics. Yet in many ways, the cases demonstrate how short-lived this triumph has been. Faced with a triple transition – post-communism, Europeanization and globalization – East European cities are reshaping themselves by invoking the end of nation-statehood and searching for either a deeply-local or deeply-transnational identity – but, in either case, a non-nation-state identity. In this sense, the editors are not only correct but perhaps prophetic in making their grand concluding claim that in their painful soul-searching for a post-nation-state identity East Europeans have found the secret of a unified Europe – the secret that European Union bureaucrats have sought for decades and have yet to find. In this sense Eastern Europe may indeed be the 'New Europe'.

Cities after the fall of Communism is a superb volume that must be added to the library of any scholar interested in Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet world. Further, by offering unique insights into the intersection of architecture, urbanity and culture, this book will be useful to scholars in a number of humanities and social sciences – for example, art history, architecture, sociology and cultural anthropology. It will make excellent reading in graduate seminars in any of these disciplines.

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After amnesia: learning from the Islamic Mediterranean urban fabric by *Attilio Petruccioli*, Edizioni ICAR, Polytechnic of Bari, Bari, Italy, 2007, 238 pp. ISBN 978-88-95006-03-1.

If we analyse the construction process of a house, we see that the builder possesses in thought the

form of the house; he knows what the fact of being a house is. In a certain sense the house has its beginnings in house: in something immaterial (its concept) that generates something that includes the material (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IX 1050a, 5-10).

The form of territory is the text in which history is written and the primary tool in understanding, recording and translating it. It is the direct expression of the history of mankind. The great feudal societies of the past can be considered, above all, as great civilizations of urban and building fabric, where economy, society, religion, and culture are all legible in a great common vision, in a great unified design, which finds in the urban and building fabric, and in their traces and persistence, the historical evidence of its existence and identity. Civilizations such as that of the Chinese and *Dar al Islam* reveal, in the immense variety of their buildings designed around a courtyard, 'always the same and yet always different', the reason for their existence. They tell us of the readings and interpretations that man has carried out over time. They patiently and precisely explain to us the civic organization of those societies. They let us glimpse, and know how to read, the possible forms of their future.

This is the main reason why Attilio Petruccioli's *After amnesia* is a precious document in the study of urban form. A civilization of urban and building fabric lends itself perfectly to a morphological interpretation of its urban and territorial structures, even when these are complex and profoundly stratified from a historical perspective. The book is full of interesting and useful insights not only in the numerous case studies analysed, ranging from Spain to Bosnia and from North Africa to the Middle East, but also in the issues that are addressed that have significance for the whole discipline.

In an ample introductory chapter, entitled 'The fourth typology', the author clarifies the concepts informing his work (for instance, the concepts of *type* and *typological process* and those of *organicity* and *seriality*) and highlights their profound historico-cultural implications. He then proposes a reading of the Islamic Mediterranean urban fabric. The book deals in turn with three interpretative tools and three scales for the concept of *type*, ranging from *building type* to *urban organism*. The author sheds light on a complex reality, whose systemic and civic dimensions, and so perhaps the more profound reason for its history, often eludes us.

Petruccioli offers us an efficient interpretative key. His interpretation of the Mediterranean

Islamic city is at all building scales, with a multitude of references to the societies and territories that produced it and transformed it over time. It is a reading of the urban landscape carried out with a striking awareness of the methodological value of this source of experience and of its paradigmatic role in the study of urban form. The city is unified in conception yet infinitely varied in its manifestations. Like every organism, it is comprised of homogeneous and complementary parts (*urban nuclei*), each formed by a composite fabric of elements (*building types*) connected by a complex series of links. It is the *routes* that set up the dialectic hierarchy between *nodality* and *anti-nodality* that guides the formation of the fabric and consequent urban polarities (*landmarks*): route, urban nucleus, fabric, building type, polarity-landmark are therefore the basic tools for understanding the Mediterranean Islamic city, but they are, above all, morphological concepts of great methodological efficacy. According to Petruccioli much of the confusion and disorientation in contemporary architecture is caused by the failure to find an alternative to market-oriented individualism, fashionable nihilism and picture-book historicism. He seeks a solution to the traces that human actions leave in the landscape. He is

not simply referring to the macroscopic phenomenon of the Roman *centuriatio*, but also to the primitive routes on top of ridges, landmarks in the urban topography, and signs on façades that signify permanence. These are the elements of spatial and historical continuity that fully represent a record of civilization (p. 9).

The scientific value of this work is not limited to *Dar al Islam*. Using this as a starting point, the whole humanscape is addressed, and has paradigmatic value in the interpretation and planning of different humanscapes. The tools of urban morphology and process typology are here verified and reinterpreted in a rich sequence of case studies, with a single, conscious critical and methodological vision, from the particular to the universal, from the family dwelling to the urban community, and from the territory to the large cultural enclave. Petruccioli's approach is both deductive and inductive, attentive to the physical reality of built environments, but constantly committed to placing them within a broader critical framework, in which the case studies are not fragments of a lost mosaic, but elements of an organic system, in a continual exchange of contents and meanings.

So the book seeks to uncover the settlement logic of the Islamic Mediterranean Basin, and partially completes 35 years of the author's research, in that koine which could be called the final legacy of the classical world, but also perhaps its most interesting modern translation. 'In Syria, in Palestine and Jordan, Islam guides the Byzantine city to the brink of modernity with no sensible breaks in continuity' (p. 224). The vast number of measured drawings, of both buildings and urban layouts, the breadth of the historical perspective within which they are analysed, the scientific awareness with which they are contextualized, and the theoretical and methodological clarity with which they are interpreted, all make *After amnesia* a very interesting experience in the field of urban morphology and building typology. It is a work against which we should measure ourselves in our future research.

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Archetipi di territorio by Anna Marson, Alinea Editrice, Firenze, Italy, 2008, 287 pp. ISBN 8860553008.

Modern urban planning has become a rational discipline mainly focused upon regulating the growth and development of cities. But can planning really address the needs, problems, pressures and changes occurring today within urban territories? Can it really help to shape new settings or better regulate existing ones for the inhabitants, with the aim of integrating them with their social and natural environments?

Anna Marson in her book *Archetipi di territorio* (*Territorial archetypes*) searches for answers to such questions by looking at how meanings, traditions and values related to our habitats have evolved over time. In her own words, she looks for 'archetypes of territory', namely what has remained constant through time and has responded to humankind's most essential needs. She finds a number of archetypes which she analyses from the point of view of different disciplines, such as mythology, anthropology, philosophy, etymology and religion, and then compares them to present cities and landscapes.

Her objective is to find approaches to urban planning that consider both the natural environment and the environment that has been culturally adapted to accomplish a respectful relation between people and nature, and in which humans ultimately become part of nature. To this end Marson says that she wants to rediscover urban planning's 'cosmic anamnesis', 'as a reflexive practice continuously verified on the basis of natural rules, instead of a mere functional or rhetorical technique' (p. 16). Reflecting on archetypes may help to plan sustainable places, whose meanings, well established and rich in symbolic connotations, will not vanish with time.

Suggesting that sustainable planning projects should be based on the study of the role of natural elements in shaping the territory and archetypes resulting from a long process of interaction between nature and man, Marson reports the abuse of natural elements and archetypes by modern society, and by ideologies supporting the use and capitalization of land and exploitation of natural resources.

In most ancient cultures mythical theories about the cosmos were based on the four elements: earth, water, fire and air. Life comes from and depends on the equilibrium among them. They are the first archetypes upon which Marson focuses. She uncovers how, through history, they have been representing a whole system of functions and meanings. At the same time she realizes that today we consider them almost like chemical elements that we own, careless of their power, and make use of for our purposes.

Then Marson focuses her analysis on the city itself and its traditional formation along cultural lines tied to our understanding of our place in the cosmos. Although we can still read systems of rules, symbols and their meanings in many historical centres today, Marson points out that we cannot find the same in modern urbanization. Therefore she continues her search for other archetypes: the urban centre, borders, gardens, and natural areas. From her analysis Marson observes that humans have engaged in a process of progressively losing the balance between distinct parts of the city and consequently losing 'meanings' important to reading the city. She hopes for a recovery of these sensations and archetypes so that knowledge and experiences well rooted in history can be rediscovered.

The book concludes with a proposal for a process by which to recover relationships between planning and territory through memories, an anamnesis of the past, and the study of archetypes and their modifications. Accordingly Marson

distinguishes four needs: to avoid uncontrollable urban growth and to find natural rhythms of growth; to slow down by reclaiming old knowledge and traditional techniques, instead of thinking in terms of logistics, consumption and technological choices; to shape, defined as providing architecture that relates to an urban planning that regains sense, meanings, references and, in Vitruvius's words, '*concinntas*'; and finally, to find again – not trying to dominate nature but utilizing traditional design and spatial processes, and imitating or interpreting nature through a dialogue with territory.

Reviewing the book I found a fascinating journey through history, and through several disciplines, in search of forms, meanings, symbols and traditions to help us discover how places, or territories, have been shaped and successively changed through time. The author investigates why old values and meanings have been lost. Her historical analysis has a colloquial rhythm that is rich in information and references, and stimulates further reading. Identifying what she finds wrong with today's cities and planning, Marson does adopt a circumspect attitude. The choice, relevance and details of some of the arguments about actual problems seem to reflect the desire to provoke and encourage discussion. There is, perhaps, a gap between the accuracy of the historical analysis and the reporting of the present-day urban condition. The author's aim to provide foundations to support a more conscious and reflexive approach to territory is evident.

Archetipi di territorio is thoroughly absorbing. It should prove an inspiration to students of architecture and planning and is also recommended to professional planners and politicians dealing with territory.

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Planning Latin America's capital cities 1850-1950, edited by Arturo Almandoz, Routledge, London, UK, 2010, 282 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-55308-7.

First published in 2002 as a hardback edition, *Planning Latin America's capital cities 1850-1950* was awarded the 2004 International Planning History Society Prize for the best book on Spanish and Latin American planning, and the recent paperback edition not only reflects the continuing

growth of interest in the local diffusion of foreign-developed planning models and ideas but also underlines the relevance of the work in itself. The book focuses on the planning history and urban modernization of Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Santiago de Chile, Mexico City, Lima, Havana, Caracas and San José as part of a series dedicated to 'capital cities'. Previous volumes studied the planning processes of European, Middle Eastern, and twentieth-century capitals, and recently included the capitals of central and south-eastern Europe and Pacific Asia.

Concentrating on a key phase of the post-colonial period, when the predominance of the United States in technical and cultural terms was incipient and urban reforms and development plans mirrored European ideas, *Planning Latin America's capital cities* deals with the modernization of important capital cities and looks back at the transfer of modern ideas that led to the local crystallization of planning and its institutionalization in Latin America. Notwithstanding that the political independence of Latin American countries occurred a few decades before the period covered by the book, *Planning Latin America's capital cities* avoids simplistic attributions of their characteristics to the effects of external economic dependence. The form of Latin American cities is explained not only in terms of the interests of foreign investment but also by the attitude of Latin American elites. From a cultural perspective Latin America's adoption of foreign planning ideas is understood as part of native aspirations for national identity and modernization, and the dream of transforming the colonial-city image into a somewhat European-like civilized urban environment. Stating that 'every city has once wanted to be another' (p.109), the book has made a significant contribution to the debate on the diffusion mechanisms of planning. It deals with the dynamics of the process, and in places unveils a very creative nature in the attempt to adapt the importation of foreign spatial models to specific contexts and incorporate local elements.

Whilst British participation in the post-colonial Latin American urban economy was predominant, French urban prestige was conspicuous as Second-Empire Paris became the paradigm of 'civilization' and 'refinement'. Haussmann's diagonal system of boulevards and tree-lined avenues, together with Beaux-Arts architecture, became a modern sign of urban quality, both in technical and aesthetic terms. Not surprisingly, 'Paris goes West' was once under consideration as a possible title for the book. The term 'urbanism', commonly employed by the

authors, affirms the French planning tradition in Latin America and only in later times, when the presence of the United States could be felt, did the word 'planning' become more popularly used.

Under the editorship of Arturo Almandoz, an Associate Professor of the Urban Planning Department at Simón Bolívar University in Caracas, and himself a notable researcher and authority on Latin American planning history, scholars from different backgrounds manage to 'combine ingredients relating to urban history, urban culture and its representation, the emergence of planning and the transfer of urban ideas and models' (p. 10). Almandoz is himself responsible for the lively introduction and initial chapter, presenting a strong theoretical framework for, and good articulation with, the subsequent series of case studies. The well-structured sequence of chapters leads to the conclusion that the diffusion of European urban models and planning ideas was uneven in Latin American capitals and less evident in the smaller cities. Some of the capitals acted as intermediaries in the diffusion process. One is left in no doubt as to the richness of the theme of internationalism within urban history.

To sum up, *Planning Latin America's capital cities* reveals undeniable expertise, brilliant and comprehensive analysis, and an impressive myriad of sources. Extensively illustrated, it makes a remarkably innovative contribution to the documentation and understanding of the building of Latin America's capital cities. Moreover, it is a fundamental piece of urban history both for local urban morphologists and historians and also for those researching the development of non-capital and hinterland towns, many of which have taken their capitals as role models.

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Planning Europe's capital cities: aspects of nineteenth century urban development by Thomas Hall, Routledge, Abingdon, UK, 2010, 408 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-55249-3.

Originally published in hardback in the late 1990s, Thomas Hall's *Planning Europe's capital cities* was described then as 'a remarkable achievement' (Fehl, 1998, p. 119) and as providing 'a convincing

argument for the emergence of systematic planning theory' (Maiershofer, 1999). It has now been reprinted in paperback form, making it more affordable and accessible to both scholars and students interested in the design of urban environments and the evolution of urban planning in Europe. With a foreword by renowned urbanist Sir Peter Hall, the republication in 2010 must be appreciated for its rich account of city planning within Europe's most politically significant settlements during a time of great social, environmental, economic and cultural change; a time noted as the continent's 'first golden age of planning' (p. vii). Incorporating topics such as political power and governance, public health, finance, legal structures, transport technologies and demographic growth – subjects that will already be familiar to those interested in Europe's urban past – *Planning Europe's capital cities* provides an analytical approach to urban places during the nineteenth century, when the arranging of towns and cities was thought to be a technical issue 'in which the functional coincided with the beautiful' (p. 330).

Hall investigates both celebrated cities such as Berlin, London, Paris and Vienna, and lesser-researched settlements, including Budapest, Christiania (Oslo), Copenhagen and Stockholm. He sheds light on the greatest planners of the nineteenth century such as Georges Haussmann in Paris and John Nash in London, and lesser known or lesser respected individuals who contributed to Europe's urban development, for example James Holbrecht and his 1862 plan for Berlin (p. 195) and Ildefons Cerdá whose extension scheme for Barcelona is described as 'one of the most remarkable urban development projects of the nineteenth century' (p. 133).

Hall offers a breadth of exploration rarely evident in books investigating the European city of the nineteenth century, providing both a truly comparative and continental-wide review. Despite the coverage of individual cities varying in depth and length, with chapters ranging from eight to twenty-nine pages in length, what Hall dexterously manages to reveal is the similarity of challenges faced within Europe's cities even if the responses, that is the public plans created and implemented, had a character that depended upon local or national circumstances. The planning practices that were developed in the nineteenth century radically transformed Europe's capitals. City walls, for instance, a prominent earlier feature, were in numerous places removed (p. 45) so as to allow settlements to spill out in a controlled manner onto

hitherto greenfield sites and ameliorate the effects of confined urban living (pp. 335-43). However, as Hall demonstrates, earlier traditions associated with arranging urban environments were maintained within many cities after 1800, including the tradition of allowing urban growth to take place bit by bit (p. 124). He reaches such conclusions based on exhaustive use of source materials. Furthermore by utilizing a variety of primary and secondary sources he is able to deduce that prominent late-nineteenth century theorists such as Sitte, Stübben and Unwin, individuals who had a massive impact on formative modern planning, sought to systematize many of the nineteenth-century capital city planning experiences so that they could create new social structures (p. 362).

For scholars seeking to inform their students of the nature of nineteenth-century urban plans and the ordering of nationally and internationally significant settlements, Hall's work has great merit. It is easy to read, and incorporates a large number of illustrations. For teaching students when and why planning emerged, what it sought to solve, what ideas it sought to express, what similarities or differences European plans had, how they compared to earlier urban design schemes and how they affected the subsequent evolution of planning, there are few better starting points.

References

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Multiple city: urban concepts 1908/2008, edited by *Sophie Wolfrum, Winfried Nerdinger and Susanne Schaubeck*, Jovis, Berlin, Germany, 2008, 344 pp. ISBN 978-3868-59001-2.

During the first decade of the new millennium, richly illustrated voluminous books on newly

emerging urban conditions became increasingly popular. Trendsetters included Rem Koolhaas and the Harvard Project on the City with books such as *Mutations* and *Great leap forward*. *Multiple city: urban concepts 1908/2008* accompanied an exhibition of the same name at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, Germany. The book and exhibition were jointly produced by Sophie Wolfrum and Winfried Nerdinger in collaboration with Susanne Schaubeck of the Technical University in Munich. The book is concerned with not only urban conditions but various urban concepts utilized by architects and planners. This approach was selected so as to honour Theodor Fischer (1862-1938), an influential urban planner, teacher and architect. Fischer was responsible for, among other things, Munich's late-nineteenth century city extensions.

The book is organized in 16 chapters, each devoted to a specific urban concept. Every chapter includes two or three texts by the editors and invited authors. Among them are renowned authors such as Iain Borden, Ole Bouman, Ricky Burdett, Christoph Luchsinger, Neville Mars and Alex Wall, who collectively introduce urban concepts in a chronological order, although some of the concepts discussed are shown to have a lengthy influence. 'Urban models and dogmas, occasionally postulated apodictically and irreconcilably, usually disintegrate in time, to be replaced by new perceptions and requirements or by new ideologies. But they leave behind their traces, for they can in many respects become routine, sedimenting so-to-speak in continued effective layers' (p. 7). Between each of the chapters are blocks of images. These consist of specifically commissioned photographs of urban landscapes and a selection of sketches, perspectives and plans, such as Lucio Costa's competition design for Brasilia, the plan of Rome by Muratori, Bollati, Bollati and Marinucci, and Rem Koolhaas's plan for the IBA Berlin.

The publication of *Multiple city* occurred in the midst of a global financial crisis. In this context the two texts that comprise the last chapter, 'Mythos metropolis / mythos megacity', are especially pertinent. Based on the results of the 'Endless city'

study by the London School of Economics and Deutsche Bank's Alfred Herrhausen Society, Ricky Burdett concludes that 'cities are not just concentrations of problems – which they are – but they are also where problems can be solved' (p. 322). Ole Bouman presents a much darker picture when analyzing Dubai's development. He concludes that 'in an oasis surrounded by the battles for Kashmir, earthquake rubble in Pakistan, confrontational politics in Iran, civil war in Iraq, conflict between Israel and Palestine, genocide and famine in East Africa, and chilling destruction of the tsunami, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Buddhists, and especially many agnostics have come together to celebrate the epitome of human wealth. If one thing is obvious, it is that this celebration is oblivious to the looming misfortune and disaster' (pp. 315-6).

Confronted with crisis, the question remains whether and how architects, urban designers and planners can help to improve the situation. This question is partly addressed by Christoph Luchsinger's text 'Two kinds of cities'. He refers to Leonardo Benevolo who once remarked that modern town planning only took shape when a regulating intervention in cities could no more be prevented.

With its concise overviews and insights *Multiple city* is commendable to anybody interested in the histories of cities and their current transformations. The fact that not all contributions are presented in German and English is slightly confusing despite the generally clear structure. It leaves some worthy contributions inaccessible to a broader international readership. Furthermore, similar publications might want to expand the focus of urban concepts developed outside the Western world. Despite these limitations, this book offers a wide range of informative insights. Together with the further readings provided for each chapter, it will act as a welcome tool for teachers and students.

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Forthcoming articles in *Urban Morphology*

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