



Revolution? Architecture and the Anthropocene

Susannah Hagan, 2022,
Lund Humphries, £24.95,
ISBN 978 1848224889

In an era inundated with ecological and climate crises, the call for environmentally sustainable solutions has never been louder. Hagan tackles this by dissecting the ambivalence within the architectural profession about environmental concerns. Divided into four engaging essays with curious titles – Overthrowing (the aesthetic order perhaps?), Converting (architects to environmental design?), Making, and Educating – and written in an accessible language and portable format, the book serves as both a critique and a call to arms. Hagan proposes that a true revolution (the title of the concluding chapter) lies in integrating environmental design with architectural education and practice.

The focus of the book is two-fold: it critiques limited and often technologically skewed approaches to environmental design, and advocates mainstreaming environmental tenets in architectural education. Hagan argues that architects and educators who emphasize only the technical aspects of environmental design are missing the potential for a more holistic, creative integration that includes climate, biodiversity and aesthetic considerations. Comparing the Modern Movement's overwhelming success with the environmental movement's relative inertia, Hagan examines the historical and sociological reasons for the dissonance between architecture and environmentalism.

Although the book is less about providing solutions than identifying a systemic

problem, it does include some case studies. Practices like East focus on minimizing new construction and working with existing contexts, challenging the notion that 'new is always better'. Transformative initiatives like BIG's Masterplanet and organizations like C40 Cities and Arup emphasize holistic, multidisciplinary approaches that prioritize environmental performance. Examples from innovative studio work across architecture schools in the UK, Denmark and the US highlight what is possible. Regenerative design and materials are also discussed as the way forward.

The book is well-referenced and illustrated (in monochromatic tone), making it a valuable resource for further academic exploration. Hagan has written extensively on urban and environmental design, and is a critical voice. Although this work leans more towards architectural practice, its universal message will be of wider interest. A more direct exploration of this topic in the context of urban design, cities and urbanism is articulated in Hagan's earlier work *Ecological Urbanism: the nature of the city* (2015).

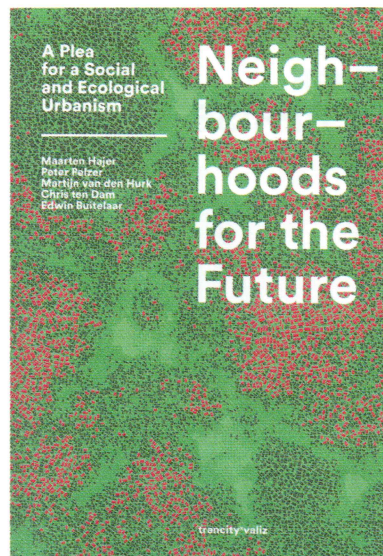
This is a compelling critique of the state of architectural education and practice in the context of pressing environmental concerns, and is an insightful read for anyone keen on understanding the challenges and opportunities that lie at the intersection of architecture, design and environmentalism. ●

Krystallia Kamvasinou, Senior Lecturer in Planning, Urban Design, Architecture, School of Architecture and Cities, University of Westminster

Neighbourhoods for the Future, A Plea for a Social and Ecological Urbanism

Maarten Hajer, Peter Pelzer,
Martijn Van Den Hurk, Chris Ten Dam,
Edwin Buitelaar, 2022, Valiz,
£27.50, ISBN 978 9492095787

The overall premise of this book is that we cannot continue to plan cities as we have in the past; climate change demands that we decarbonise our lives and that means reducing car dependency which in turn leads to a different type of city. The authors

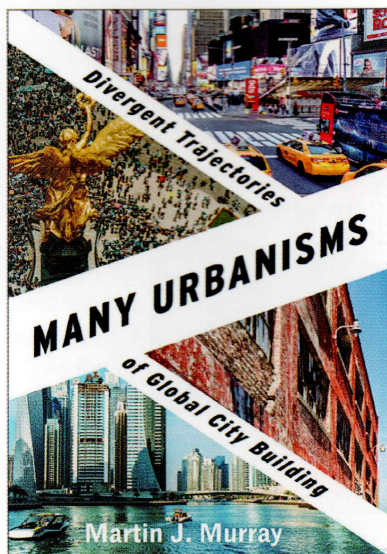


take the view that this can be achieved by starting from the neighbourhood, a scale that people can relate to and where results can be achieved and seen. The first part of the book sets out this claim and justifies it by looking at the way that cities developed in the 20th century, eating more and more land, isolating and alienating people and creating car dependency. The authors suggest that future neighbourhoods should be sustainable, offer sociability, affordability, inclusiveness and adaptability, and they offer ways to achieve this.

The second part of the book looks at a number of 'neighbourhoods of the future' briefly commenting on their successes and how these have been achieved. Many lessons can be learned from these 'scans' as they are each very different: for instance, the main objective for Kalasatama, a Helsinki neighbourhood, is 'to give people an extra hour of free time a day'; for others it may be restrictions on car use that predominate.

The third part analyses in greater detail three major examples of recent urban transformation: Bo01 in Malmö, Regent Park in Toronto, and Overvecht in Utrecht. In each case the authors evaluate the successes and failures of the scheme and in particular the gaps between aspirations and results. As an example in Bo01, in spite of careful building design and construction, energy consumption is much higher than predicted because of people's lifestyles (inter alia screen time).

Finally the authors reflect on what inspiration can be drawn from the examples provided; they emphasise that this is not a 'cook book', there are no recipes; the neighbourhood is 'imaginary'. However they see ecology as an intrinsic part of urbanism, not an add-on, and they suggest that in a good neighbourhood 'actors have a long-term commitment'. They still list some rules for thinking about future neighbourhoods,



from 'develop beyond the car' to 'ownership for the public domain', and from increasing density to building coalitions.

Overall this is a well presented and clearly argued manifesto. I would however worry that concentrating on neighbourhoods, without looking at how these add up to a city, may be missing a point. We cannot just work on isolated areas within a city, all neighbourhoods are interconnected and a well-functioning one is not enough. This interconnection is missing from a book that is otherwise full of inspiring examples. ●

Sebastian Loew

Many Urbanisms: Divergent Trajectories of Global City Building

Martin J Murray, 2022,
Columbia University Press,
£30, ISBN 978 0231204071

The issue of whether we have enough books extolling current urban design thinking has finally been answered. This book suggests that we change course. Many of us have been waiting for something that takes us out of our comfort zones to tackle difficult issues about burgeoning world cities. Globalisation has influenced much of this discourse, and the ubiquity of glass towers and huge traffic jams, what Deyan Sudjic called the 'edifice complex', seems to be the response seen in cities around the world. Is that to do with what is taught in urban design courses in more developed, yet declining, countries? Or what about the people who, in their thousands, come to cities and put up dwellings made of waste materials in order to live and

work? *Many Urbanisms* confronts some of these dilemmas.

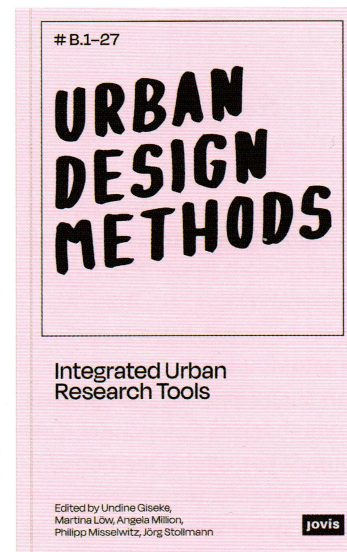
Murray, a professor of urban planning at the University of Michigan, sets out current conventions reviewing global urbanism from declining post-industrial cities to the sprawling informality of most unplanned megacities at the other. He poses three questions: Should we be aiming for globalism in urbanism? Should we set out to establish diverse and distinctive urbanisms within current urban practice? Should we better understand the nature of urbanism as it is found outside the developed world? Not globalism, but uniqueness. The book grapples with these, tainted though they may be by issues such as colonialism.

There is also the unfinished provisional city, and the concept of uncertainty that can be hard to take on board because it involves strategising. Urban designers find it difficult to envisage cities like Detroit, where people left their homes and went elsewhere, or informal development in squatter settlements around megacities like Kibera or Sao Paulo. Whilst the early forms of 'city' were of a recognisable size, such as Saltaire or the Garden City, they became exemplars and were exported around the world. Murray describes today's instant cities in the Gulf or Far East as symbols of money and having arrived; Lagos or Manila flout both their opportunism and poverty.

Aspects of governance, technology and quality are acknowledged, however, uncertainty and risk management are not part of urban design coursework, but perhaps should be as key parts of urban life. Urban designers don't look for ambiguity, but tend towards what the book calls 'remedial antidotes... the prototypical model that expresses an imagined vision of future possibility'. We favour normative solutions that may be inappropriate, especially if they are imported. As Murray writes, 'at a theoretical level the one all-consuming search for universally applicable paradigms, and for general theories of urbanisation has fallen into disfavour. What has filled the gap in urban studies literature has been a withering array of analytical frameworks that offer piecemeal and fragmentary perspectives on cities'.

Perhaps it is time to unlearn some urban design criteria in favour of listening to what people want and aspire to.

This book is aimed at academics rather



than practitioners. Of the 360 pages, 150 are for notes and bibliography, and it would benefit from more illustrations, especially of informalism. There are seams of gold in this book hidden by dense and academic language that need to be mined in order to uncover their meaning. However, it makes significant steps to answer some of the issues regarding global urbanism. ●

Jon Rowland, urban designer and
masterplanner

Urban Design Methods, Integrated Urban Research Tools

Undine Giseke, Martina Löw, Angela
Million, Philipp Misselwitz and
Jörg Stollmann (eds) 2021, Jovis
£26, ISBN 978 3868595710

This curious but welcome book is deceptive at first glance. It is curious because its structure, in two parts, begins with a short pink section in which a range of topics are addressed, from Sino-German cooperation in urban design to the value of interdisciplinarity. Among these are 22 External Statements from eminent academics and practitioners which stand alone unexplained. While interesting, these pink pages might have been better as a coherent introductory narrative to set up the main event that follows.

This aside, the book is welcome because the much larger (white) section systematically works its way through 27 different analytical tools. Each follows the same structure and consists of a profile page with a title, reference number and further reading suggestions; the main text briefly and clearly