



BOOK REVIEWS

J.W.R. Whitehand and the historico-geographical approach to urban morphology edited by *Vitor Oliveira*, The Urban Book Series, Springer Nature Switzerland, Cham, Switzerland, 2019, 138 pp. ISBN 978-3-030-00620-4.

This book was compiled in honour of geographer Jeremy Whitehand, Editor of *Urban Morphology* and prominent morphologist, on the occasion of his 80th birthday. As mentioned by M. P. Conzen in his Foreword, this opus is a far cry from a loosely connected collection of essays that often mark such tributes. Rather, Editor Vitor Oliveira has invited six contributors, all senior colleagues or collaborators of Whitehand, to reflect upon the latter's multifaceted contribution to the field. The approach is systematic. But it is in no way thorough, which would have been an impossibility considering the sheer abundance of Whitehand's research work, spanning over 5 decades.

In Chapter 1, Oliveira situates Whitehand's work within the broader historico-geographical approach introduced in the UK in the seminal work of M. R. G. Conzen, a German émigré who escaped from Nazism in the 1930s. As mentioned by both Kai Gu (p. 34) and Peter J. Larkham (p. 68), Conzen, a geographer, had responded to the invitation formulated in 1899 by Otto Schlüter to develop the scientific means to study the cultural landscape (*Kulturlandschaft*) in parallel to the exploration of the natural landscape (*Naturlandschaft*). Whitehand is without a doubt Conzen's principal academic successor. He has contributed tremendously to keeping Conzen's legacy alive, while making significant contributions of his own to the development of the field.

Regular readers of *Urban Morphology* are familiar with Whitehand's remarkable efforts to ensure the diffusion of morphological research stemming

from different theoretical schools of thought and regions of the world. Oliveira appropriately sheds light on Whitehand's work as co-founder of the International Seminar on Urban Form and Editor of this journal, before focusing on his substantive contribution to urban morphology as a field of knowledge. He highlights in particular his contribution to the development of the concepts of urban *morphological region* and *fringe belt*, and on *the role of the agents of change* in urban morphogenesis. The latter themes are discussed at greater length in dedicated chapters. Kai Gu (Chapter 2) delves into the notion of urban morphological region, which refers to unitary areas in the urban landscape.

'Regionalization' is a key morphological analytical procedure. It rests on the postulate that there exist spatial arrangements in the landscape that manifest a 'morpho logic' that can be empirically demonstrated. Gu points to Whitehand's sustained empirical contribution in a large number of case studies. He then discusses how Whitehand has contributed to expanding the scope of the notion: by testing it empirically in new territories such as China; by conducting dual analyses that factor in the role and impact of agents in the production of the landscape; and finally by exploring the operationalization of morphological regions for planning purposes.

The fringe belt is another concept developed by Conzen that Whitehand has revisited regularly throughout his career. Fringe belts are tracts of land that correspond to peripheral locations and are characterized largely by non-residential land-use units seeking such a position. A city's landscape can display a number of such belts deposited in the course of its history. As Michael Barke stresses (Chapter 3), Whitehand has contributed to advance fringe-belt studies in 'new and exciting directions' (p. 53). He intuited in particular that, in their initial

and later development, fringe belts are subjected to specific economic dynamics, an idea that he would then explore and substantiate in numerous empirical studies. In addition, Whitehand deepens our understanding of fringe belts by unveiling the role of various agents in their land-use change dynamics. More recently, he contributed to expanding the scope of the notion by applying it to new fields of inquiry, including in China.

Larkham (Chapter 4) discusses how Whitehand has contributed to clarifying the nature of agency and the role of agents of change in morphogenetic processes. Larkham defines *agency* as comprising 'the range of processes by which things happen in the urban landscape', including the decision-making process and its consequences for built forms (p. 70). He suggests that the notion of agency has been instrumental in Whitehand's historico-geographical theory of urban form, the framework of which relies on 'inductive and deductive chains of inference, relating particularly to innovation and construction activity, within the context of social and economic forces' (p. 73).

Karl Kropf (Chapter 5) pays a tribute to the quality of Whitehand's scientific contribution, while exploring how rigour is achieved in urban morphology by the use of an array of comparative techniques. Kropf highlights in particular how, in the absence of experimental control, painstaking comparative work conducted at different spatial resolutions is essential to reveal and contrast typical configurations, as a preliminary step to elaborating explanatory frameworks.

Ivor Samuels (Chapter 6) works on the relationship between academic research and practice in Whitehand's investigative work and writings. Again, regular readers of this journal have probably noticed the call made by Whitehand in several of his editorials for researchers to reach out to practitioners and vice versa. Whitehand has always been aware of the practical implications of his research. He believes, rightly, that morphologists could have a lot to contribute to city planning, urban design and heritage preservation. As further evidence of Whitehand's concern for this, it percolates several chapters of the book. In spite of the obvious benefits, collaboration remains difficult to foster, as Whitehand himself experienced first-hand when invited to participate in UNESCO meetings on heritage conservation.

This book offers an excellent introduction to the work and thinking of one of the most prominent urban morphologists. It does so in an honest way that does not hide some of the challenges

and difficulties faced by Whitehand in the course of an exceptionally productive career. He has been able to renew himself as a researcher and to remain relevant for more than 5 decades. This reader is certainly looking forward to his future contributions.

Pierre Gauthier, Department of Geography, Planning and Environment, Concordia University, 1455 de Maisonneuve Boulevard West, Montréal, Québec, Canada. H3G 1M8. E-mail: pierre.gauthier@alcor.concordia.ca

Inventing future cities by Michael Batty, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2018, 282 pp. ISBN 9780262038959.

Michael Batty starts from the stance that when it comes to cities 'we now stand at a threshold with respect to what we are able to predict (or rather not predict)' (p. ix) and that the future of cities is something we can only invent. This initial hypothesis might come as a surprise to those familiar with Batty's previous works, from *Urban modelling: algorithms, calibrations, predictions* (Batty, 1976) to *The new science of cities* (Batty, 2013), which have offered a rich panoply of models, analyses and simulations representing the cutting edge of city science and prediction. The present work does not offer solutions, visions or recipes, but instead offers a reading of where we stand today in relation to cities: their size, form, function, relations and dynamics. It proposes approaches to investigate, theorize, envision, plan and design their future.

The first chapter lays out the hypothesis of unpredictability centred on an understanding of cities as complex systems, and what that entails. The city is a process involving many individual actions of many different actors in fast cycles, occasional large and slow planned interventions, and subject to external unpredictable events. Urban form, the product of this process that we see, is from this perspective a state in the city's evolution, not necessarily ever in equilibrium. Here Batty also introduces a collection of five laws or principles that are inherent in complex systems and cities: Zipf's law, Glaeser's paradox, von Thünen's standard model, Well's proposition, and Tobler's first law of geography. These laws are used in subsequent chapters to explore the nature of cities.