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Book Review

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Book review

Graphics for Urban Design, 2nd Edition.

B. Meeda (ed.). ICE Publishing, London, UK, 2018, ISBN 9780727761712, £55-00, 168 pp.

Graphics for Urban Design is a reference or guide book. Its scope is very broad. It goes from technical to impressionistic, from bird's eye view to street sections, from 'hard' to 'soft' maps, from hand to computer drawings and so on. There isn't too much theory, but backgrounds and purposes are clearly stated. The applicability in the practice of urbanism is obvious. This is supported by the contents being clearly structured and the presentation richly visual. The relevance is stressed in the foreword by Robert Huxford, director of the urban design group: 'Visual images are powerful means of communicating ideas. They can explain ideas and proposals clearly and swiftly [—]. The intension of this guide is to help producers of graphical communication to be aware of the impact of their work [—].'

This reviewer, an urban designer and educator by profession, found it interesting to try and look at the material presented in the book also in other ways. For instance, it is possible to recognise 'families' or types of images apart from the structure of the sections and chapters of the book.

The very first image is an example of a detailed, computer-generated bird's eye view of a master plan, what is called a rendering, for which the technique and imagery were developed in the last two decennia, specifically in China. There is a whole family of this type of images in the book, on different scales. These images can be attractive but are sometimes closer to advertising than to urbanism. The 'realism' cannot always be taken for granted. There are also many maps and drawings in the book that are related to or taken from morphological drawing techniques, with different degrees of detailing and on all scales. In Delft, the Netherlands, this reviewer's home school of architecture, these are called reduction drawings, intended to explicitly select map information so as to show formal structure. This can be effective in presenting the characteristics of a plan, or an existing context, to both colleagues and stakeholders, but also as a tool of analysis for the designers themselves. The last could be said about the book as a whole. Then there is a family of purely analytical maps, offering insights in different aspects like patterns of use and function or technical matters. It might have been interesting to show how these families developed in time in different parts of the world, but the book has been understandably and convincingly chosen for practical applicability.

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