



Book Review “Re-shaping Cities”

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Guggenheim, M. and Söderström, O. (Eds.): Re-shaping Cities. How Global Mobility Transforms Architecture and Urban Form, Routledge, London, 256 pp., €35.00 (paperback), ISBN-13: 978-0-415-49291-1, 2009.

Edited by Michael Guggenheim and Ola Söderström, *Re-shaping Cities* addresses the question of cities and globalization. Letting aside the active part taken by (world-)cities in globalization processes – though the question remains in the background – it explores how mobility of people, building types, medias and even of buildings themselves contribute to the evolution of worldwide architecture. In other words, the book “deals with how the *here* in the built environment is always also an *elsewhere*” (p. 3).

The first part handles theoretical issues: the two editors (Introduction) and Anthony King (Chapter 2) remind the reader of the main processes of globalization – coming down to an increased mobility of capital, ideas and highly qualified workers – and of the dialectical nature of the relationship between mobility and fixity (p. 8) and, importantly, offer a joint attempt to clarify linguistic issues raised by the concept of “building type”. King also underlines the crucial role of power in the circulation of built forms, especially within processes of appropriation of buildings and building types.

The following contributions illustrate these premises in three steps. They first address “Mediations and mediators”. Guggenheim (Ch. 3) unravels the logic of legal decisions assigning a type to buildings according to their form or use, which happens to be the result of complex negotiations, while Monika Grubbauer (Ch. 4) shows how an impression of global uniformity derives from the circulation of a few out-of-context images of high-rise towers.

Chapters 5 to 8, case studies dedicated to “Circulating Types”, all illustrate, in different geographical and historical contexts, processes of negotiation, re-appropriation and/or re-coding of buildings and building types. The last part, “Shaping Places”, eventually shows how globalization is embodied in urban landscapes, through signage in Washington D.C. Chinatown, the changing architecture of Palermo or the stones used for Manchester buildings.

Considering the consistent way the book assumes the complexity of globalization, its conclusive chapter proves unexpected – to say the least. After a quick summary of the book’s main ideas, Lynda Schneekloth embarks upon a long plea for the respect of local cultures and natural resources, both dangerously threatened by a worldwide movement of destruction. “Unmaking” is described as the evil side of any “making” process, a reality that would tend to remain unnoticed either because people cannot or do not really want to see it.

An all the more surprising conclusion if one considers how, together with a pleasant form and a rich iconography, the variety of methodological approaches and research fields offers a very wide and highly stimulating investigation of a till now too little documented component of globalization. The nine case studies address the dialectical relationship between fixity and mobility and between a so-called global cultural standardization and local forces of constant re-appropriation and remodeling of imported goods and ideas. What could have been a weakness – a relative heterogeneity due to the variety of disciplines and treated objects – ends up being the main strength of the book, offering numerous original ideas to the reader, whatever his scientific background.