M. Neuman and W. Zonneveld: Routledge handbook of regional design

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1 Introduction

The key concepts of Region and of Design are most relevant, especially in combination, which justifies more research and publications on this topic. The concepts are hard to pin down though, as the editors of this book acknowledge. A specific focus for both of these concepts is chosen and explained in the introductory chapters. The Region is understood here as the supra-metropolitan area, defined primarily by the settlements and infrastructures therein. The layered physical landscape in which the urban operates is more context than starting point. The meaning of Design on this scale is less about appearance (shapes, forms, locations) of a wider cultivated landscape or about interrogating synergies between the many land use functions, but rather the forging of regional governance strategies that accompany the inevitable: the ongoing expansion of the built environment humans call home.

This focal choice created a book with a specific interpretation of regional design. The book offers an eclectic collection of chapters which take angles varying from description of implemented policies to advocating methods for understanding the spatial organization of the urban and its environment. The book provides contributions by most of the key names that have defined the field (Neumann, Zonneveld, Steiner, Faludi, Dühr, Salet) and important more recent voices as well (Balz). They take stock of how this type of regional design has been understood and practiced in the second half of the twentieth century.

Discussing regional design requires a short account of its pioneers, main features and its current urgency, which is what the first chapters of this edited volume introduce the reader to. We see mobility and city size grow, urging the visionaries at the time to plea for regional networks of green spaces and functional networks of settlements. Theory about the process of putting visions into effect by argumentation, discretion, holistic perspectives, flexibility and visualization is well explained in these first chapters. The urgency of leading stories inspiring integrated spatial policy in the face of deep uncertainty and fragmentation of power becomes clear.

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After that backdrop is presented, half of the pages in the book (Chapter 5–16) are spent on a geographically encompassing coverage of attempts to influence pace, location and connectivity of urban growth on the metropolitan and megalopolitan level. This part of the book ranges from Chile to Korea, Australia to Europe, Japan to Kenya and much in between. The chapters in a concise way (they each contain around 12 pages) describe how urbanization in the respective metropolises was guided by ambitions on what dispersal of urbanization best to aim for. The historical development of spatial policy outcomes in its economic and societal context receives most attention in this main part of the book. Mostly left implicit are the argumentations that were constructed and the processes of deliberation leading up to the described policy frames, with the exception of the chapters about Greater Paris and Sydney that offer a view on the multi-scalar dependencies, the spatial concepts used and how these emerged. Throughout the diversity of case descriptions, the common denominator becomes clear because of the geographical variety: the urge to promote urban and economic growth while safeguarding quality of life has led governments across the globe to use rail investments, growth policies and green belts to make that happen.

These chapters (5–16) concentrate on the geographical scale of often well over 10 million inhabitants and more than 500 km in diameter. One might say this makes this part of the book more about the spatial, economic and infrastructure *policy* than about spatial design *informing* policy, more about states than about regions, more about past eras than the ones ahead of us, more about describing than prescribing, more about cities and infrastructure than about landscape in the integral way that the challenges of our time would require.

The perspective turns to the ecological, rural and marine environment in Chapter 17–20. These chapters present specific ways to look at qualities of space that are often overlooked or detached from discussions about the metropolitan urban: regional flows of building resources, aquatic environments, green networks and the rural as an asset for the urban. How these perspectives will influence decision-making procedures and spatial choices on the regional scale remains to be discovered. The last four chapters of the book address pedagogy, visualization, maps and complexity.

This Handbook offers a wealth of well-documented case histories of supra-metropolitan urbanization strategies, supplemented with an inspiring diversity of special topics on how to understand certain qualities of the region and its governance. The chapters are not used to support an overall assessment, innovative new approach or particular advice.

The specific perspective chosen in this Handbook makes the reader curious and hungry for ideas on how to make regional design also work for tomorrow's acute challenges of energy transition, sustainable food production, protecting water resources, reduction of mobility demand, green space preservation and climate adaptation. These topics have strong spatial relevance as well and have led to many cases that address a smaller, but still regional scale (in the range of 1 million inhabitants, 100 km diameter), where a functional and administrative integration is needed that an integral landscape design perspective can bring. This is the other kind of regional design, the one researchers such as Meyer, Nijhuis, Kempenaar, De Jonge, Meijsmans, De Zwart, Dembski, Koh, Stremke and Van den Brink have been publishing about. This tradition has the layer approach, integral landscape analysis and ateliers for collective visioning in its toolbox. Regional design as a comprehensive way-finding strategy and how it informs today's integral policy-making for the abundance of land uses that make up a region is a relevant perspective that complements the angle of this Handbook.