



Mapping Detroit: land, community and shaping a city

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development of the research-base of architecture, urban design and allied fields. Over the years, Steadman has contributed as few others to the definition of what research on built form can be like in method and what it can be about in substance. Thus, the book comes as the culmination of work situated in a broader field that the author has himself helped to create.

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Mapping Detroit: land, community and shaping a city, edited by June Manning

Thomas and Henco Bekkering, Detroit, Michigan, Wayne State University Press, 2015, 252 pp., (paperback), ISBN 978-0-8143-4026-4

Mapping Detroit is not merely a book which depicts the physical transformation of a post-industrial city through various maps illustrating the causes of social and economical decline. With the significant contribution of the editors, urban designer Beckering, planner and community life observer Thomas and their colleagues, it makes a profound contribution to the subject of how spatial evolution of a city is brought about. Detroit, as it is discussed throughout the book, is an interesting case/model, not only among American cities but also in the different continents of the world. The introduction compares Detroit with other cities throughout the world, such as Berlin, Moscow and Birmingham among others, in terms of its spatial organization and population loss. The book is unique as it reveals how a city can develop very fast with an automobile industry at its peak and then collapse with decentralization, the wrong economic and political strategies and federal acts. There are similarities with other cities as it faces the challenge of post-war difficulties or other urban dynamics, such as shrinkage, social inequity, the exodus of residents and segregation. However, either in terms of its scale, location or fragmented structure, Detroit could

not rapidly recover as happened in other former industrial cities. In that sense, *Mapping Detroit* is a critical book, as it claims not to categorize the land use of Detroit in the conventional way that we are used to, but discusses current and possible emerging land usages and patterns. Therefore, it opens up discussions and questions to the readers, whether urban designers, planners, leaders and stakeholders, on the future of Detroit and other cities. Lynch states that, "It is impossible to explain how a city should be without understanding how it is" (Lynch 1981, 39). Contributors structured the book for the reader first to understand how the city was in the past, followed by its development to its present situation and raises discussions for the future.

The book is organized in three parts; the first part deals with the spatial evolution of the city from a French colonial, 'ribbon farm' city to an industrial city and its decline and redevelopment. The second part of the book describes the portions of the city represented through the maps of industrial sites and their evolution, transportation and accessibility issues. The book also explores two neighbourhoods which experienced similar decline within Detroit, but had slightly different responses or impacts on the urban form. After the review of the historical evolution and current problems, in the final part the authors focus on understanding the potential of the city, and discuss Detroit in both its ecological and social contexts. Instead of a conclusion, the book finishes with an epilogue which examines the *Detroit Future City* report.

The authors of the book include an observer, urban designer, architect, planner, historian, map librarian, demographer and academics. Each chapter utilizes hand-drawn maps, engravings or reproduced maps using GIS technology. Through reading these maps readers can easily follow the spatial evolution, existing situation and the visionary projects about Detroit.

Part I is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 is written by Brian Leigh Dunnigan, who describes the early shape of Detroit from agriculture, trade and military fortification and how these affected the spatial formation of the city, giving insights to the reader to understand how the current city is formed. Here the term 'charting' is used to determine the changes and development of the city. In chapter two, which is titled 'City of Holes', Henco Bekkering and Yanjia Liu discuss the disconnected pattern which has emerged in Detroit.] The authors discuss the evolution of the city from past to present after the industrial decentralization and population loss. They have used sequential maps (both historical and reconstructed maps by the authors), from the eighteenth century up to the present. They give a detailed explanation on how they produced the maps, their techniques and limitations of the research. Moreover, they explain attempts to redesign the city, its growth and decline. They have defined nine spatial systems (rivers, early fort, ribbon farms, ten thousand acres grid, Jefferson grid, radial avenues, street grids, railroads and highways) in order to depict the morphology of Detroit and its development. In chapter 3, June Manning Thomas concentrates on four phases of development: public housing, urban renewal, community development and empowerment zone. Thomas emphasizes the impacts of government-sponsored projects of mayors on the redevelopment of the city, but notes that these efforts also resulted in social and economical decline.

In part II, both chapters 4 and 5 mainly focus on how transportation shaped the city and people. In chapter 4, Robert Fishman starts with the theory of the linear city (Miliutin (1974) and Le Corbusier), and discusses how rail lines shape the scattered industrial sites and morphology of Detroit in relation to workers' houses. Chapter 5 continues with the transportation issue, both in the regional and social context. Joe Gregens explores a series of maps in order to reveal the geographic distribution of accessibility and its relation to social equity by looking at the relation of people and spaces in terms of their affordability to certain transportation types. He compares accessibility of white and black residents to jobs, specific places and public services. Detroit fails in terms of its public transportation. Different from the first two chapters of part II, chapters 6 and 7 give the two neighbourhoods of Delray and Brightmoor as examples of places facing similar problems to Detroit but on a smaller scale. However, their reactions to decline and the way they cope with similar problems are different. In chapter 6, Maria Arquero de Alarcon and Larissa Larsen

reveal how Delray experienced decline and population loss, both with unequal distribution of power and resources, as well as intentional and unintentional acts of local government. Differently, in *Brightmoor*, Margaret Dewar and Robert Linn reveal how one neighbourhood deals with the issue of vacant land and how community involvement can reshape a city.

Finally, in chapter 8 Lars Grabner proposes new ways for interpreting the current situation of Detroit and suggests non-traditional approaches to cope with decline. Taking for granted the existing features of the landscape, Grabner emphasizes the green structure of the city and the need to integrate the greenways with industry. According to the author, there should be more innovative and creative solutions such as landscape parks, urban farming rather than small-scale gardening, as well as ecological approaches and place-based approaches rather than growth-based ones. Questions raised in this chapter are worth noting, such as patterns of change in land use, reoccurring planning and urban design patterns, and new social and economic opportunities (171). In chapter 9, June Manning Thomas discusses Detroit in the social context using *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* concepts of Tonnies (2001) as ways of understanding community and examining both current realities of fragmentation in the region, and the possibilities of creating a greater sense of community. Thomas gives Hamtramck as a good example of a small-scale city with a unified ethnic enclave and diverse urban quarter that has learnt to live together and negotiate many issues, from religion to politics. Finally, in the epilogue Griffin and Thomas summarize the important parts of the report *Detroit Future City* and give an overview of the framework plan and innovative approaches for the future plan of the city. Maps illustrate this epilogue and compare existing land use with a proposed 50-year land use scenario, ranging from existing park systems to a future open space system and employment districts. Therefore, the authors discuss the potential of the city within the report in terms of economic development and growth of sustainable neighbourhoods, public assets, open spaces and multi-functional urban patterns.

As mentioned above, *Mapping Detroit* goes beyond revealing the spatial evolution of one city guided by an automobile industry that has since experienced vacant land problems and various urban issues. It is a unique organized collection of maps, analysis and discussions, which makes it a must-have book that helps us to comprehend current challenges of our cities, intervention types, fits and misfits of regulations, strategies and governance.

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