

już dziś wartość kronikarską. W każdym rozdziale podręcznika mocniej rysują się procesy przemian, które zachodziły w miastach, a słabiej dzisiejsza ich rzeczywistość i jej geneza.

Wartościowym przekazem podręcznika dla specjalistów zajmujących się planowaniem przestrzennym jest niewątpliwie porządkująca narracja

omawianych zagadnień wzbogacona o syntetyczne definiowanie uchwyconych zjawisk. Informując o podręczniku i specjalizacji geografia urbanistyczna pragnie się podkreślić realną możliwość poszerzania współpracy architektów i urbanistów z geografami, a także wyraża się nadzieję, że pola zainteresowań badawczych obu stron będą się zbliżały.

*Jan Maciej Chmielewski, prof. dr hab. inż. arch.
Katedra Urbanistyki i Gospodarki Przestrzennej
Wydział Architektury Politechniki Warszawskiej*

A NEW PUBLICATION
ENTITLED “GEOGRAFIA URBANISTYCZNA” (URBAN GEOGRAPHY)

JAN MACIEJ CHMIELEWSKI

The editorial team of “Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki” has received a book publication edited by Stanisław Liszewski whose title alone is reason enough to present it to the Readers of “Kwartalnik”. “Geografia urbanistyczna” (Urban Geography) is a university course book prepared for the occasion of launching a new master’s academic course in Urban Geography at the Faculty of Geography of the University of Łódź. The book is the result of a common effort of eleven authors specializing in Geography and associated with the University.

As a discipline, urban geography originates from research in the field of geography of human settlement, and associating it with urban planning stemmed from the authors’ conviction that the knowledge necessary to bring spatial order to contemporary cities and settlements is of interdisciplinary nature, and as such merits greatly from the contribution of geographers.

Seeing the city as a live organism, with all its multi-layered complexities, allows for different points of view and a deeper insight into this extraordinary phenomenon of human activity. Undoubtedly, urban-oriented geographical research reveals the characteristics of the city in a most comprehensive manner, which makes it fit to be made use of in a variety of initiatives for the improvement and better organisation of city-dwellers’ living conditions.

The modern approach to urban planning, especially with regard to design, has made way for a number of topics previously overlooked. The commonly adopted concept of sustained development has forced urban planners to tackle issues with a focus on urban restoration, revitalisation of areas under crisis, reval-

orisation of cultural heritage and, generally speaking, humanisation of the urban environment.

What has become a real challenge to urban planners is plans to restore historic built environment. In European cities new functions are being assigned to former ports, industrial plants, railway stations, military units, which – often located in now highly urbanised areas – have become sources of conflict. When taking up such tasks, an important prerequisite for making the right decisions is good knowledge of the structures to be transformed and of the social consequences bound to be brought by such transformations. Therefore, an educational programme offered to urban planners by geographers would prove a very helpful asset in the process of effective planning. However, this path of research is but slightly visible in the book, which is to be regretted in view of how valuable it can be to the framework of sustainable development of settlement structures. These processes are guided by the concept of creating a dense, power-efficient city, preventing suburbanisation which threatens primarily the natural heritage of the suburban areas.

The modern European city is afflicted by a number of ailments, which affects or should affect town development. Most of these ailments have been discussed in the book by referring to previous geographical research and discussing it from the geographical point of view. The discussion of issues such as ageing of the urban population, centrifugal migration, growing transportation problems, increasing human pressure on the natural environment, deurbanisation of settlement systems, polarisation of socio-spatial structures and many others will be a valuable message to stu-

dents of urban geography and will bring them nearer to urban planners and designers in their perception of the city in its spatiotemporal dimension.

The chapters of the book are given titles referring to fields of geographical research in the domain of urban planning:

- Urban physiography
- Urban climate
- Selected historical aspects of urban construction in the European culture
- Urban demography
- Social geography and socio-spatial structures of the urban environment
- The urbanisation process
- Forms and spatial structures of great urban settlements
- Functions of the city
- City centres
- Settlement system and the urban network
- Geographical information systems (GIS) in urban geography
- Basic principles of property valuation
- Urban inventory studies

As can easily be seen, these topics overlap to some extent with studies in sociology, cartography, economics and urban architecture. There are, therefore, some common areas of study where the contribution from urban geography might prove invaluable in improving planning methods for different purposes.

Spatial development in Poland suffers greatly from the fact that before starting the planning process no studies are ever conducted to diagnose the existing settlement structures and investigate the possibilities of transforming them by methods of urban design. In developing such pre-planning studies, the participation of geographers would be particularly welcome. Geographical research in the settlement process should therefore be more widely used for decision-making in design and planning, especially when launching revitalization programmes of degraded city structures.

The introduction of the study programme in urban geography at the University of Łódź should meet with approval and interest of urban planners, to what extent this programme will give proper orientation to geographical research in order to serve urban planning and urban designers. The community of architects and urban planners have noticed a number of shortcomings of the works presented in the book, mainly as regards the up-to-dateness of the discussed study results. To date, geography of human settlement has

developed a number of detailed and inspiring research methods which help to diagnose urban structures. One defect of these methods from a designer's point of view is that they are very time- and cost-consuming. A designer needs a diagnosis which would be prompt instead of detailed, since detail is difficult to translate into a project. Defining the trends of transformation is more important here than accuracy of parameters characterising it. In this sense, study results published when they have already become outdated makes them more meaningful to a historian rather than to a designer of spatial transformation.

As a course book, the new publication by definition focuses on presenting research which is deeply rooted in urban-geographical literature and which has defined schools and manners of describing the settlement process. For this reason such research is presented with a clear focus on methodology, rather than description of the reasons behind the processes at work. The text references primarily works by geographers, which is understandable, but which fails to lend deeper insight into the discussion, depriving it for example of a prognostic point of view which has greater value for a planner than a past-oriented retrospection. The cartographical side of the publication is also rather poor, with most figures illustrating the state of the art in the 1980s, which today gives them more of a historical value than practical applicability to contemporary processes. Each of the book's chapters gives more attention to city transformation processes which used to take place in the past than to the current urban reality and its origin.

A valuable message of the course book for spatial planning specialists is undoubtedly the very orderly presentation of the issues under discussion, accompanied by synthetic definitions of the captured phenomena. By presenting this information about the new publication intended for the new master's study programme in Urban Geography we wish to emphasize the authentic opportunity for extending the cooperation between architects and urban planners on the one hand and geographers on the other. Let us hope that the ranges of scientific investigations of both these groups will keep getting closer and develop towards a mutually inspiring future of the discipline.

Translated by Z. Owczarek

*Jan Maciej Chmielewski, prof. dr hab. inż. arch.
Katedra Urbanistyki i Gospodarki Przestrzennej
Wydział Architektury Politechniki Warszawskiej*