

Urban regeneration. A manifesto for transforming UK cities in the age of climate change

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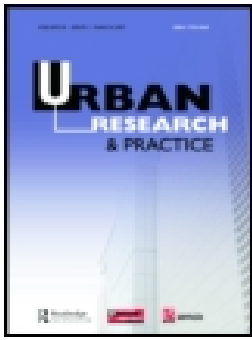
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BOOK REVIEW

Urban regeneration. A manifesto for transforming UK cities in the age of climate change, by S. Lehmann, London, Palgrave Mc Millan, 2019, xlvii + 229 pp., € 29,11 (paperback), ISBN 978-3-030-04710-8, € 23,79 (eBook), ISBN 978-3-030-04711-5

How can architects and urban designers regenerate UK cities in the service of their citizens' health and wellbeing? How can Urban Regeneration help cities in limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius?

These are the overarching questions that frame Prof. Lehmann Steffen's book, *URBAN REGENERATION. A Manifesto for transforming UK Cities in the Age of Climate Change*. The book represents the results of a series of 'Urban Breakfast' discussions, a trans-disciplinary, participatory, year-long process in which more than 140 participants from Prof. Lehmann's Cluster for Sustainable Cities debated the issues, with the aim of creating a set of shared guiding principles for urbanization and urban regeneration of UK cities.

As Prof. Lehmann states, 'urban regeneration' is an elastic concept, more than three decades old (Tallon 2010). It is often about incremental change and has been used interchangeably with other similar or complementary concepts such as revitalisation, renewal and renaissance (Tallon, 2010). As defined by Roberts (2000, p.17), urban regeneration is a 'comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental conditions of an area that has been subject to change' (2000, 17).

In the introductory chapter the concept of urban regeneration is considered as a response to needs that change over time, with projects able to reuse the existing urban fabric and to give new life to neglected spaces. The lost bond with nature, caused by uncontrolled urbanization, is the starting point for Prof. Lehmann in his analysis of the ideas of various scholars who have dealt with the urban theme and in his synthesis of the principles that can ensure a clean, happy and efficient future for cities in the UK, the geographical focus of this manifesto. The author acknowledges cities as being hubs, with flows of people, activities and goods that define a new complexity but at the same time offer many opportunities related to the concentration of ideas and resources. At the same time, climate change is forcing architects, spatial planners and policy makers to reconsider the relationship between man and nature and is underscoring the importance of reconnection between the urban fabric and the local social and cultural characteristics.

The book is divided into six chapters, with the first introductory chapter, discussed above, prefacing the challenges of regenerating UK cities through (re)urbanization. This is followed by three subsequent chapters which explore the three pillars of Prof. Lehmann's concept of urban regeneration: Nature Reconnection, Density and the Food-Water-Energy nexus. The fifth chapter is the Manifesto where its ten strategies are outlined, and the sixth chapter provides ten cases of urban regeneration in UK.

Rethinking the forms and spaces of the city to create communities and places that can respond effectively to climate change and rising global temperatures is a task of vital importance. This is the premise of the second chapter where the creation of green urban spaces is proposed according to two complementary strategies: the densification of the urban environment and the use of nature-based solutions. The devices proposed in the second chapter focus on interventions that can filter pollution, detain, collect and reuse water for irrigation and other urban purposes and green roofs and vegetated façades that provide direct and indirect benefits to buildings. The author also highlights the importance of natural capital and ecosystem services which can support the city-citizen relationship and provide an innovative approach for urban ecology assessment.

The definition of urban density and compactness with which the author begins the third chapter, allows for a categorization and ordering of different aspects of the urban fabric and their relationships, highlighting strengths and weaknesses. Designing and creating a compact city means avoiding urban sprawl through the adoption of measures such as infill, improvement of public transport, enhancement of proximity of services for citizens and ensuring accessible green spaces. Moreover, the benefits of densification are supported by the importance of ensuring urban diversity and mixed uses, while avoiding the negative consequences caused by zoning.

The fourth chapter focuses on food, water, energy and waste. The author overcomes the usual mono-sectorial approach by proposing a nexus, capable of integrating the different themes. It is a holistic approach that serves in coordinating and guiding these sectors with the aim of increasing the efficiency and interconnectedness of the urban system. Among its several benefits it supports and encourages multi-level dialogue of spatial planning and governance.

In the fifth and most important chapter, which is followed by a final chapter of ten practical examples, Prof. Lehmann defines the Manifesto for Urban Regeneration in the UK. The manifesto has been developed through a set of ten strategies with the view of guiding UK cities towards an environment- and climate-sensitive transformation. The mission is to provide a set of fundamental principles which cities do not need to discuss ex-novo for every new decision-making process. Among the principles we find the three pillars that have been discussed in the previous chapters but also the importance of the history and culture which has defined the character of the urban fabric, the interconnection of spaces, sustainable mobility, and social participation through different means including through digital platforms.

The book explores a variety of issues across the concept of urban regeneration, discussing urban complexities such as governance and economics and providing a framework aimed particularly at architects, urban designers and planners.

The manifesto will definitely be of interest to architecture and planning students who want to better understand how urban regeneration can improve environmental and climatic conditions in the urban context; moreover, to those professionals interested in physical and structural changes at the neighbourhood scale, it highlights and suggests a wide set of practical regenerative interventions.

References

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