

UrbanTick

Monday, 18 January 2010

Book - The Landscape of Contemporary Infrastructure

Infrastructure plays an important role in our everyday life. It is the part that drives the urbanMachine. In recent years the work and especially the design of the infrastructure 'objects' has received a lot more public attention. The idea of 'beautiful' infrastructure 'objects' has obviously settled by now and this demonstrates the new Nai Publishers publication 'The Landscape of Contemporary Infrastructure' by Kelly Shannon and Marcel Smets. Probably this public shift has to be seen in a wider context, than simply the recent times. The conceptualisation of the urban alias infrastructure derives from the time of the industrialisation trough to the futurists and mainly catalysed by the modernist movement. The importance of 'form follows function' for the trends of 'iconic' objects in architecture of the late nineties and early twenty-first century have translated onto infrastructure work. Traditionally this was the field of engineers but has consequently been taken over by architects. The gradual importance of the architect is reflected in the book, all the projects are classified first by the architect and if applicable followed by landscape architect, engineer, developer or artist.



Image taken from The Landscape of Contemporary Infrastructure / 'Tunnel Artifice' (1988-2008) by Architects Renato Salvi and Flora Rucjat-Roncati / on page 146-147

The book demonstrates the contemporary state of infrastructure design on a palette of projects drawn from around the world. With its 74 examples the publication could be called an encyclopedia of infrastructure projects and to some extent it claims to be a register of archetypes. Archetypes might be a bit too ambitious but icons definitely. It features the Yokohama Port Terminal by Foreign Office Architects (1995-2001), the Oresund Bridge and Tunnel by Architect Georg K.S. Rotne and Engineer ASO Group, Oresund Link Consultants (1992-2000), the High Line Park, by Architect Dillier Scofidio + Renfro and Landscape Architect James Corner Field Operations (2005-2010), the Orient Station by Architect Santiago Calatrava (1993-1998), the Millau Viaduct by Architect Foster + Partner, Bridge Engineer Michel Virlogeux and Landscape Architect Agency Ter (1993-2005), the Toledo Escalators and Car Park by Architect Martinez Lapena-Torres Architectes (1997-2000), the Hoenheim-Nord Terminus by Architect Zaha Hadid Architects (1999-2001) and the Curitiba Bus System by Architect Jaime Lerner (1966-1990) to name a few of the known examples. However there are gems to be discovered between the known examples, for example the Leidsche Rijn Bridges by Architect Maxwan Architects and Urbanists (1995-2005) or the Casar de Caceres Bus Station by Architect Justo Garcia Rubio and Engineer Jaime Cervera Bravo (1998-2003). The bridges documented in the book are really nice and the appearance of bridges has changed quite a lot in recent years, however on the other hand it still seems impossible to design a similarly beautiful rest place for a high way.

The content is structured into four chapters. The authors have chosen not to go with the common categories of infrastructure classification. The taxonomy here is structured into mobility 'Imprints of Mobility on the Landscape', physical presence 'Physical Presence in the Landscape', movement 'The Perception of Landscape Through Movement' and public character 'Infrastructure as Public Space'. The authors explain their decision: "... at a time when computer-refined search engines and availability of information are so prevalent, the mere compilation of cases has become rather senseless. Such a catalog risks becoming quickly outdated and will necessarily be incomplete. A taxonomy of design attitudes, by contrast, should remain valid over time." It could be argued against this approach, however the taxonomy is very consistent develop for this



About this blog

Cycle studies are the science of everyday life, as normal as it gets. Its focus is the daily routine, with its habits and rhythms as they occur in most citizens' lives. It is the power of the normal that brings stability and the routine that ensures security. But is is the cycles's dynamic of flow and continuation that prevents life from freezing.

Cycles therefore stand for stability but are at the same time the engine of change.

With this blog the research on cycles and rhythms will be embedded in the most recent developments in technology, covering a range of areas with a focus on space-time related technologies.

The research is undertaken at CASA Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis at UCL, London.

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publication. In this sense it makes perfect sense and together with the detailed introductions to each chapter drive the book. It could almost be said that this is really the feature that distinguishes this book from any other collection of infrastructure projects. From this view point the examples can be seen as mere illustrations. However this description would not live up to the richness of the individual example. The fact that each projects documented on a spread also live on this independent level makes this publication a must have.

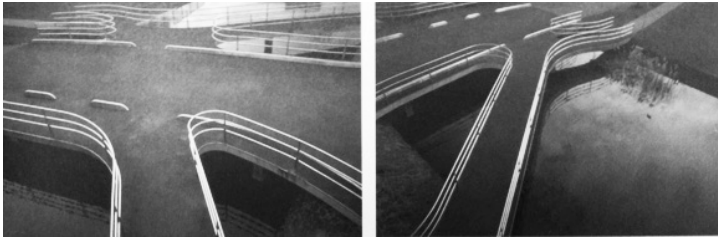


Image taken from The Landscape of Contemporary Infrastructure / "Dutch"Orgware" Leidsche Rijn Bridges by Architect Maxwan Architects and Urbanists

Nevertheless, two points of critic need to be raised. The first one is the conceptualisation of infrastructure in independent 'objects'. This approach clearly follows the iconic presentation of architectural projects of the OMA or Herzog and de Meuron type. Yes, it is a good way to reach out to consumers beyond practitioners and experts, as they are served with ready to consume glossy images. It fits the current, self promoted architectural 'Zeitgeist' of iconic, distinct, clean projects. However it misses the opportunity to establish infrastructure as something more than an 'object', but rather a collection of 'objects' or even better a network. Of course the bridge was contracted with this architect and delivered as such, but it is part of a national or maybe international network of highways. The same can be said of train stations, airports, tunnels and even car parks. More than architecture (building) projects the infrastructure calls for the context it is embedded to be considered. Take a new tram line e.g. 'Floating Boxes' Alicante Tram Stop (2005-2006 by Architect Subarquitectura on page 198-199. The 'architecture' is lovely, a brilliant example, but isn't there a lot of infrastructure missed out concerning the tramline connecting "a sting of towns along the Mediterranean coast"? The only example that actually makes use of a map to illustrate its extend and interconnection is the Qinghai-Tibet Railroad from Xining to Lhasa by Engineer Li Jin Cheng (2001-2006). It has to be said, however that the authors do mention aspects of networks and context in the introduction texts, but it is largely absent from the individual project documentations.



Image taken from planningkorea.com / the tram stop at night

The second point is the selection of presented project. There is a lot of infrastructure been left out. What about Dams e.g. the Thames Barrier; Canals e.g. Panama; Pipelines; Power Stations; Military infrastructure; research facilities e.g. Antarctica stations or space missions or CERN; environmental disaster preventions e.g. storm surges, walls and dams; grids e.g. telecommunication, power; ... The short answer might be they don't fit the iconic criteria if this was one, but the long answer might be that the field of infrastructure is simply too vast to fit into one publication and this would call for a Volume 2. As the present publications makes it on the list of must haves, a volume 2 is definitely something to consider. Table of content available from [HERE](#).

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Image taken from Nai Publishers website / a sample spread introducing the xxxxxx project, which could already be called a classic example.

Shannon, K. & Smets, M., 2010. The Landscape of Contemporary Infrastructure, Rotterdam: Nai Publishers.

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