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What's in a cover image?

How to depict planning history

Hein, Carola

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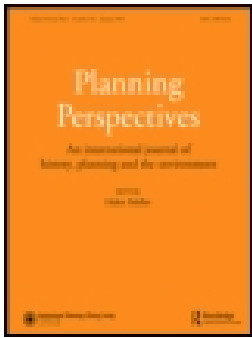
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What's in a cover image? How to depict planning history

Carola Hein

Chair History of Architecture and Urban Planning, Delft University of Technology, Delft, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

A book's cover is frequently the first visual element of a book that a reader encounters in a library, bookshop, or—most likely now—on the Internet. Combining the publisher's usually predetermined logo, typography and layout with an image provided by the volume editor or author, the cover aims to convey multiple meanings. These meanings are particularly important in a field such as planning history, where visuals of the associated disciplines play an important role. Spatial planning and urban design convey multi-faceted ideas through masterplans that are often illustrated with memorable images. Planning history explores these images as part of its approach and needs to pay attention to the ways in which images convey meaning. Taking the example of the selection of the cover image for the *Routledge Handbook of Planning History*, the article presents how five different types of images addressed specific approaches of the handbook by showcasing cross-cultural exchange, identifying key words and terms of planning history, and using comic strips, games or art work as a means of translating the multiple themes of the book. This short reflective analysis concludes by asking for more investigation of the role of images as part of the changing role of planning in society and the built environment.

KEYWORDS

Planning history; pictorial turn; visualization; historiography; methodology; cross-cultural exchange

One of the most exciting but also most difficult tasks when finishing a book is choosing an image for the cover. You want one that is visually appealing, helps sell the book (when viewers come across it on the internet or perhaps even in a bookshop), and that speaks to the book's most central ideas. In the case of the edited volume *The Routledge Handbook of Planning History* this meant representing the content of planning history and its historiography as examined through four parts and thirty-eight chapters. The cover ideally needed to express the complexity and diversity of the field of planning history in a single memorable image. It had to be an image that reflected the thought process and the discussions that went into the production of the book itself, the breadth and diversity of the discipline and its future challenges. It would speak to key elements of the questions that drove the making of the book and inspired the four sections:

- (1) What is the role of methodology and theory in the field of planning history? What is currently done and what is missing?
- (2) How can we both capture and provincialize Euro-American-Australian planning history, and contrast it with a broader, more global reading of planning history through the lens of different

CONTACT Carola Hein  c.m.hein@tudelft.nl

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localities including other language areas, such as French, Spanish, German, and from other geographical perspectives, including Chinese, Japanese, African, Middle Eastern, Russian or Latin American?

- (3) How can we enrich planning history by investigating networks of planning, including the flows of goods, people and ideas that shape planning, and the impact on cross-cultural exchange as they come to light in port cities, in capital cities, or in colonial and post-colonial contexts?
- (4) How can we measure and better understand the societal impact of planning over time in fields such as infrastructure, public health, or education, and capture the potential role of planning and (planning history) for the future?

Given the complexity of these questions and the book's goals, capturing them in a single image raised questions about how planning history uses and analyzes images. Spatial planning and urban design are highly visual disciplines, where multi-faceted ideas are conveyed through masterplans or illustrated with memorable images. Planning history often aims to explore these multiple layers and needs to pay attention to the ways in which images embrace and convey meaning. John Berger appropriately wrote in *Ways of Seeing*, 'Seeing comes before words,' (p. 7) adding that 'images are more precise and richer than literature' (p. 10).¹ Berger focused on art history and the relationship between art work, notably paintings, painter and viewer. In ways sometimes similar to, and sometimes different from, those of art, images in planning not only convey emotions, stories, or power relations. As Bill Mitchell has pointed out, images can encapsulate meaning.² They can include and exclude and can be used as instruments of power. They are agents of a discipline that has the power to transform large urban and rural areas and thereby impact the lives of large numbers of people. Planning images encompass often complex and diverging interests and ideas of political, corporate or civic groups. As Michael Neuman writes, 'The plan, because it bundled comprehensive urban policy into a package, historically crystallized debate in the political arena.'³ Translated into both an abstract master plan and a visionary drawing for the general public, the image can capture a vision of future life. The relevance of built environment imagery for every citizen lies at the heart of works such as Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City*, which itself drew on Kenneth Boulding's 'The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society'.⁴ In different societal and temporal contexts, plans and planning images can take on different meaning. Ideally, image and text support each other, but images can also be dissociated from the text that originally accompanied them, potentially creating different narratives.

A cover image not only reflects the content of the book, but it is set in a framework established by the publisher through the layout and content they require for the cover. Choosing a cover image thus becomes an exercise in balancing the interest of the editor and publisher with those of the viewer and reader. The publisher aims to establish a brand, such as the multidisciplinary *Routledge Handbooks* series that already includes hundreds of volumes. Each single cover has the potential to add to the prestige of other books, but it also competes against numerous other covers from the same series. The general framework informs the viewer about the existence of a series by using the same formatting and typography. It includes the company's logos, which effectively work as images. In this setting, the author only has a limited opportunity to add an image into an established frame. Together, the frame

¹Berger, *Ways of Seeing*.

²Mitchell, *Iconology*.

³Neuman, "Planning, Governing, and the Image of the City," 61–71.

⁴Lynch, *The Image of the City*; Boulding, *The Image*.

and the respective image need to convey the content of the book (as seen by the editor and the authors). It aims to capture the gaze of potential buyers or readers. The editor needs to choose where to place the work in time, space, and within disciplinary schemes. That also means anticipating (where possible) what readers see, and assessing what kind of power relationships or associations may emerge in viewers' eyes. These goals and thoughts translated into several approaches for cover images (Figures 1–5). Some illustrations made it into the book, but only one is used on the cover. Now I will offer a brief analysis of the thoughts surrounding the selection of images for the cover provides insight into key themes of planning history as addressed in the book. I will also showcase the ways in which images capture the complex discussions in the field.

Collages of cross-cultural exchange in planning

The first proposal for the cover aimed to capture the growing focus of researchers on a more global exchange of planning ideas (Figure 1). It showed the global exchange and re-interpretation of Howard's garden city concept through the translation of select key images.

The collage raises the question of how the transfer of images introduces ideas into a foreign context, including in languages that use different characters. It suggests that the message carried with the images may be different from the ones carried in textual translations. The collage method brings translated and adapted images, from a variety of places and times, onto the same surface. The idea for this cover emerged from the desire to inspire more research into the transmission of planning concepts. It aimed to raise questions about the particular time periods when a concept travelled into other cultures, the specific routes that it took, and the impact that it had in the context of the specific time of exchange. Comparing and contrasting the way that images travel can enrich studies of planning exchanges. The impact of Howard's drawings and text on Russian, Czech, Japanese or Chinese planning thought has gone beyond the moment of the first appearance of the book. Some translations have only been made in recent years. Occasionally translations of images have preceded those of the text. Although many studies have explored the garden city idea and its applications,⁵ there is still room for further attempts to understand the interconnected nature of planning and of ideas that travel across borders and through time. This includes exploring the diverse forms of import and export of ideas. Such an analysis fits into ongoing research on the export and import of planning in line with the writings of Ward, Volait and Nasr, Sandoval and Kwak, King, or Hein.⁶ However, for a book with a global reach, showing how an idea generated in and for the British context at the turn of the twentieth century may not present the right message. The collage of visionary plans that idealize public planning and that were never intended to be applied in this way, may be too academic and not in line with contemporary planning or the type of research that the book wants to inspire. Furthermore, as a collage the images are too small, and most of them are in black and white, wasting the opportunity for a colourful cover.

⁵Domhardt, "The Garden City Idea in the Ciam Discourse on Urbanism," 173–97; Ward, *The Peaceful Path*; Liora, "Garden Cities in Colonial Africa," 477–85.

⁶Ward, *Planning the Twentieth-century City*; "Re-Examining the International Diffusion of Planning"; "The International Diffusion of Planning: A Review and a Canadian Case Study," 53–77; "Planning Diffusion"; Sandoval-Straus and Kwak, *Transnational Cities*; Hein, "Special Issue on Transnational Urbanism"; Nasr and Volait, *Urbanism – Imported or Exported?*; King, "Writing Transnational Planning Histories," in *Writing Transnational Planning Histories*, ed. Nasr and Volait.

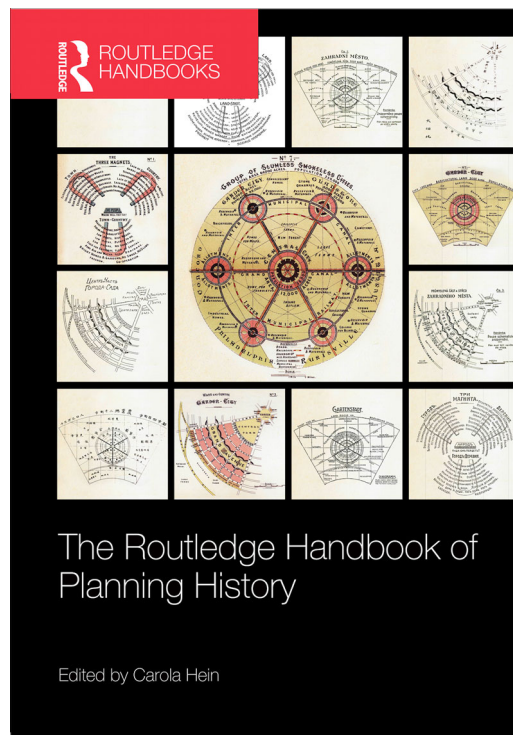


Figure 1. A first proposal for a cover that features translations of key images of Howard's garden city concept into multiple languages including German, French, Czech, Russian and Japanese. Source: from top line, left to right: Top line: Diagram No. 1, The Three Magnets in: Ebenezer Howard, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd. 1898; Diagram No. 3, translated into Japanese in: Naimushō Chihōkyoku, Denentoshi, Tokyo: Hakubunkan, Meiji 40 1907; Diagram No. 3, translated into Czech, in: Hruza, Jirí, *Stavitelé měst*, Praha: Agora, 2011; Diagram No. 3, in: Ebenezer Howard, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd. 1898. Second line: Diagram No. 2, translated into Czech, in: Hruza, Jirí, *Stavitelé měst*, Praha: Agora, 2011; Diagram No. 3, translated by Alexander Block into Russian: in Goroda Budushavo, St. Petersburg, 1911. Center: Diagram No. 7, in: Ebenezer Howard, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd. 1898. Third line: Diagram No. 2, *Gartenstädte in Sicht* translated into German by Maria Wallroth-Unterlip, Jena: E Diederichs, 1907; Diagram No. 3, *Gartenstädte in Sicht* translated into German by Maria Wallroth-Unterlip, Jena: E Diederichs, 1907. Bottom line: Diagram No. 2, in: Ebenezer Howard, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd. 1898; Diagram No. 2, translated into Japanese in: Naimushō Chihōkyoku, Denentoshi, Tokyo: Hakubunkan, Meiji 40 1907; Diagram No. 5, translated into Japanese in: "Nishiyama Uzō, "The Structure of the Base of Life," *Kenchikugaku kenkyū* no. 110+111 (1942). Reprinted in Nishiyama Uzō, *Chiikikūkanron*, Tokyo: Keisō shobō, 1968; Diagram No. 5, in: Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1922.

Word clouds: capturing the discipline of planning history

The Handbook of Planning History aims to define the specific sub-discipline or field of inquiry, so the second cover proposal featured a word cloud drawn from the content of the book (Figure 2).

Finding a common language is an important starting point for research; it is particularly important if the research includes cross-cultural investigation. Meaningful exchange can only take place if key terms are defined in similar ways. The difficulty of translating the concept of urbanism and planning from one context to another has been showcased in the book by French sociologist Christian

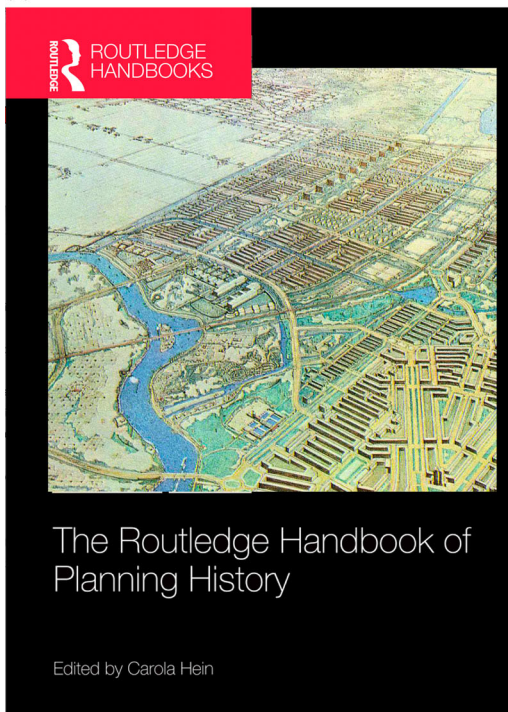
image is not captivating enough: while it relocates words into a new image it ignores the power of images to transport concepts and to translate them differently than words.

Original images capturing planning visions

Rather than focusing purely on words, other cover versions put original and often famous drawings or visuals at the centre (Figure 3(a and b)).

Several authors of the *Handbook* suggested the use of iconic plans such as the Greater Amsterdam Plan by Cornelis van Eesteren that provided an attempt at universality through association with the CIAM IV conference. Such suggestions again raised concerns about whether there was too strong a focus on European practice for a book that aims to provincialize European, American, Australian planning practices. Plans like the one proposed may also be considered too difficult to read and insufficiently appealing or too complex for diverse audiences, including planning historians who specialize in texts. One way to overcome a potential professional bias was by using comic strips. Artists like the Belgians Francois Schuiten and the French writer Benoît Peeters have produced a series of architecture and urban form-based comic strips under the title *Les Cités Obscures* (*Cities of the Fantastic*). The series includes the volume *Brüssel* (translated into English in 2001), a beautifully

(a)



(b)

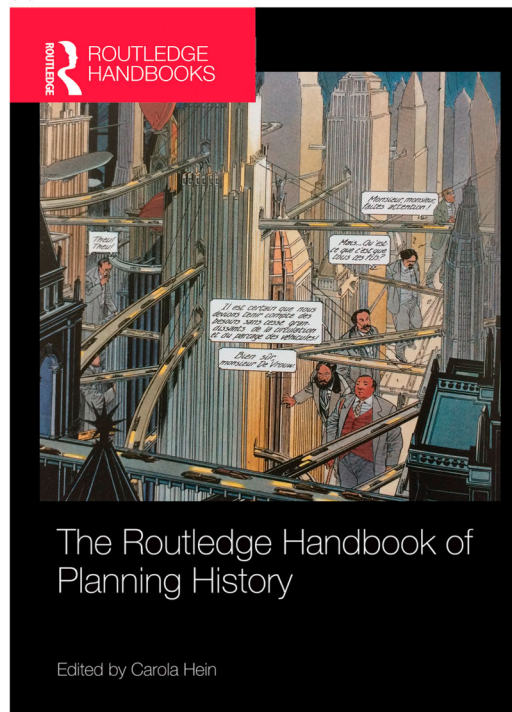


Figure 3. (a) A version of the cover that uses Cornelis van Eesteren's Urban Expansion Plan for Amsterdam from 1935, *Dienst der Publieke Werken* (with the kind permission of the EFL Foundation). (b) A version of the cover of "Brüssel" a comic strip that used fictional commentary on visual planning and reality drawn by the team of the Belgian artist Francois Schuiten and the French writer Benoît Peeters, @Casterman (with the kind authorization of the authors and Editions Casterman).

illustrated critical comment on the transformation of Brussels.⁸ Aesthetic as well as socio-economic questions of planning history are captured in complex drawings aimed at a general public, effectively engaging a broad group of people in what can otherwise be a highly professional, abstract debate. These graphic novels built upon the Belgian comic strip tradition that has long served as a visual tool to comment on or critique urban form. Brussels-based designers trained at the La Cambre art school were often active in the citizen group ARAU (Atelier de Recherche et d'Action Urbaine). Since the late 1960s they have often used similar graphic approaches to foster a citizen-based response to the glossy modernist architecture depictions used by investors to promote highway- and skyscraper-dense city designs.⁹ Their work heavily relied on images to communicate with a broad audience. They succeeded in creating a unique base for citizen participation and showed the importance of a visual-based education questioning the emergence of modernism as the leading design paradigm. Despite their beauty, socio-economic relevance and appeal to the public, each of these comics includes words in recognizable languages, making them too limited for a single image cover, or too specific in terms of the content that they depict.

Planning for and with citizen participation

Planning as a discipline has important professional implications; it is also a practice that has a huge impact on the general public. Another set of images tried to address this issue by going a step further. In order to generate a cover that could include the general public, another playful version of the cover depicted urban board and electronic games (Figure 4).

The desire to find an image that was colourful, without (or with very few words), engaging a broad public beyond professionals, and that encapsulated the idea of planning beyond architecture, led to yet another version of the cover, one that used city-based (electronic) games as the basis. Many board games have commented on urban planning. Perhaps the most famous example is the predecessor of the game *Monopoly*, which was developed in the United States in 1903 as *The Landlord's Game*. Game designer Lizzie Maggie originally conceived of it as a critique of monopolies, where a single entity dominates a market. The game entailed a societal critique, but it also related to concrete urban form. The original version of the *Monopoly* board used the streets of Atlanta, but it has since been adapted to many other cultural contexts and cities, popularizing street names and locations. *Settlers of Catan* is another game that captures the need for planning in its rules. Electronic games take education in city building even further. *Sim City* perhaps best captures the need to provide road infrastructure, water, electricity or waste services, and diverse leisure and culture amenities to citizens to create tax benefits and make people happy. Most of these games (board and electronic) are based on capitalist and/or neo-liberal principles. *Sim City* only allows for square blocks and provides few options for variation. The attractiveness of these games and the playful engagement with a broader public have led urban actors to engage with serious gaming. Such games can provide insights into sustainable port-planning, citizen participation, or to engage youth in energy saving. *Port of the Future Series Game* and *Age of Energy: City-Zen Serious Game* are examples of gaming as a planning tool.¹⁰ Such initiatives are in line with earlier attempts at educating citizens using the media of their time, such as the travelling exhibition *Look at Your Neighborhood* by the New York Museum of

⁸Schuiten and Peeters, *Brüssel*.

⁹Barey, *Declaration De Bruxelles; La Reconstruction De Bruxelles, Recueil De Projets Publiés Dans La Revue Des Archives D'architecture Moderne De 1977 À 1982 Augmenté De Trente Pages Inédites*; "Arau Brussel = Bruxelles = Brussels."

¹⁰Deltares, *Port of the Future Serious Game* <https://www.deltares.nl/en/software/port-of-the-future-serious-game/>; Amsterdam Smart City, *Age of Energy: City-Zen serious game*, <https://amsterdamsmartcity.com/projects/city-zen-serious-game> (last accessed 24.4.2019).

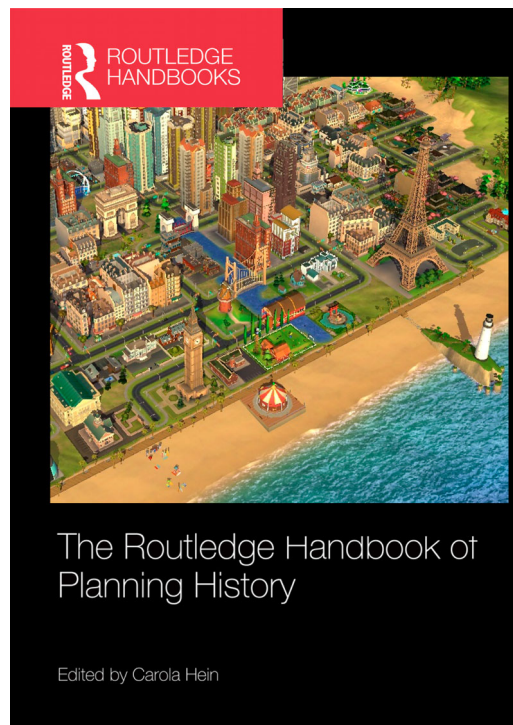


Figure 4. A screengrab from a *Sim City* game that shows popular engagement with urban planning through gaming.

Modern Art (MoMA) in the 1940s, or the TV series that featured the Dutch planner Jaap Bakema in the series from *Van Stoel tot Stad* (From Chair to City) in the 1960s. An investigation into the long history of citizen participation that discusses the ways in which planning is taught to the general public through the visual media of its time would be a valuable addition to the field. Education is critical in planning and constitutes an important topic in planning history. For the cover of the book, however, images of these games do not capture the essence of planning, its history and historiography or the need for wider participation in the field.

Abstractions, art and theory in planning history

The various images proposed for the cover page spoke to some aspects of the project, yet none of them fully captured the book's essence. Ultimately, the *Legendary Cities* work of the artists Atelier Olschinsky provided the final solution (Figure 5).

Testing several works from the series helped to identify the final cover. A colourful depiction of an abstract, seemingly planned space attracts the eye of the viewer and allows the observer to reflect on the role of infrastructures for flows and associated construction. It speaks to urban and regional topics of the built environment without locating them in a particular space or time. The beam crossing the image on a diagonal on the selected cover can be seen to represent a highway as well as a glass fibre cable network. It suggests the abstraction of economic planning and its representation as well as its physical, spatial composition. The layering of space and the apparent changes in scale capture the



Figure 5. (a–b) Two versions of the cover featuring different selections from the *Legendary Cities* series by Atelier Olschinsky (with the kind authorization of Atelier Olschinsky).

multiple, palimpsestic layers involved in planning. Although people are absent from the image, it is clearly a space that has been conceived and built. It is the role of the viewer to superimpose human activities or nature. The space could be a utopia or a dystopia. As it is depicted, it provides the viewer with choices about possible futures and potentially invites responses. In these images, the viewer is the subject of action and not the object of a narrative or educational activity.

The choice of the cover image was discussed extensively, and with some disagreement, by the authors of chapters in the *Handbook*. The discussions showed the diverse perceptions of the role of a book cover, the role of visuals in planning history research, and the role of different cultural settings in the use and assessment of images. Ultimately, the business of choosing a cover image for the *Routledge Handbook of Planning History* posed issues that the group of participants concerned found intriguing, both with regard to the process of choice of image for this specific book project and more generally about questions of visual imagery. Although firm conclusions about the latter inevitably lie beyond the findings of this short reflective analysis, they would include such questions as: At the time of the pictorial turn, when images become more and more prominent, how have planners used images to communicate with clients and the general public? How has this approach changed over time and in, and through, place? How have images been disseminated globally and how were they received and perceived as compared to texts and their translations? In what way do images in planning history reflect professional, political or other biases in planning and planning history research? How do new digital and social media change the role of images in the practice of planning and in planning history? A careful study of the historic and contemporary use of images can help us

(c)

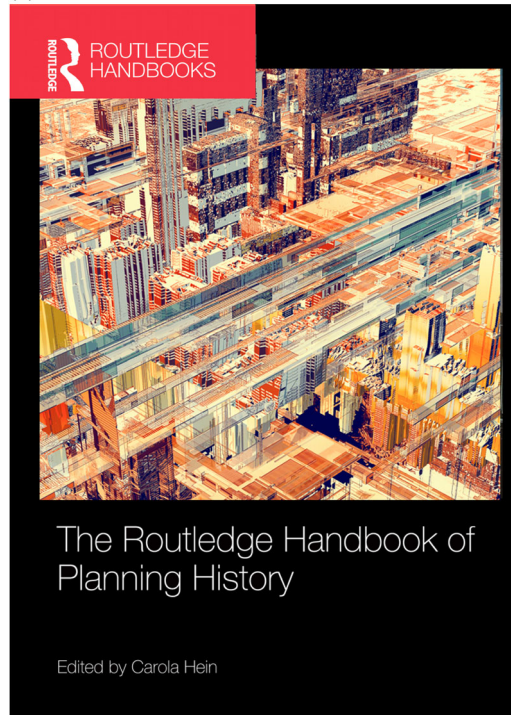


Figure 5. (c) The final version of the cover with a selection from the *Legendary Cities* series by Atelier Olschinsky (with the kind authorization of Atelier Olschinsky).

to better understand the changing role of planning in society, in creating our built environment and in shaping the future of our cities, regions and planet. Such an investigation is all the more important as images and data visualization become more widely used to shape public opinion. Images of plans and planning are key elements in our society and historians need to understand their role at a time of rapid technological innovation, social transformation, climate change and energy transition.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Carola Hein is Professor and Head of the History of Architecture and Urban Planning Chair at Delft University of Technology. Her book publications include the *Routledge Handbook of Planning History*, *The Capital of Europe*, *Rebuilding Urban Japan after 1945*, and *Port Cities*. She currently works on the transmission of planning ideas among port cities and within landscapes of oil.

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