ABE Kazutoshi eds.:

*Toshi no keikan chiri: Tairiku Yoroppa hen* 
(Geography of Urban Landscapes: European Cities).


‘Geography of Urban Landscapes: European Cities’ is a collective effort of twelve researchers on social and cultural landscapes in the Continental European cities. This geography text is aimed at high school and college freshmen in an attractive format. It is the 5th volume in the series ‘Geography of urban landscapes', volume 1 and 2 being Japanese cities, followed by volume 3 Korean cities and volume 4 Chinese cities.

In the first chapter, Takenaka describes the characteristics of residential landscape in Barcelona especially focusing on the role of an urban redevelopment plan. The next two chapters deal with the urban landscape of Paris. In the chapter 2, Abe, who is the editor of this book, examines the relationship between Paris's landscape and the accumulation process of companies' headquarters. Whilst the unity of building height is notable in the central area of Paris, high-rise office developments, driven by the Paris's urban primacy, have been dominant in neighboring areas. In the next chapter, Aramata explains that the background for the historically preserved district of ‘Le Marais', focuses not only on conservation plans but on the social milieu that has created the district itself. Whilst in a cultural context, Oshima argues that Amsterdam is culturally, religiously and ethnically tolerant, identifying that the rapid increase of Muslim residents in the last few decades, mainly from Turkey and Morocco, give the city complexities and difficulties.

In the chapter on Copenhagen, Yamane regards the well-balanced street landscape, especially the façades of the many buildings in the streetscape, as very significant for the city’s identity. In the next chapter, Kagami, based on his research career in many European cities, explains Vienna’s uniqueness in terms of cities’ dynamism: its locational potentiality being in the center of and a contact point for east and west Europe and its changing function of a city.

The following three chapters are dedicated to German cities. Kobayashi points out that typical German cities tend to be located close to rivers. He also identifies other elements of urban landscape as important, such as a market, city hall, church, walls and green spaces. Fujitsuka argues the role of urban redevelopment plans in the process of urban revitalization using the case study of Munich. Yui, Funck and Kawada focus on ‘public involvement’ in the community development process (*machi-zukuri*) in Heidelberg, Freiburg and Berlin. They regard the ‘bottom-up' approach particular to German cities as crucial. In the final part of this book, Terasaka examines Ankara, the Turkish capital city, in terms of historical and political backgrounds that are characteristic to the city.

My first impression of this book was a disorderly hodgepodge because I could not find any common aspects of the example cities. Some famous European cities such as Paris and Amsterdam were used, however other important cities like London and Rome were excluded. In addition, two in ten chapters for Paris and three for German cities were dedicated, which seemed an imbalance. More surprisingly, I felt it was unusual to use Ankara as an example of a European urban landscape.

However, the unique methodology, a main purpose of this text, changed my mindset to enjoyment. The explanation of the urban landscape from the historical, political and ethnic viewpoints is a consistent theme throughout this book. Key questions are: “How is current urban landscape brought about?” and “Who played an important role for the city so far?” Thus this collection gives those who have not traveled to these cities a better understanding of the characteristics of each city.

It is disappointing that very few theme maps are used except some general historical ones. However, many photographs are used to help to understand the cities. A comprehensive description seems to give us a virtual excursion of each city. This type of explanation of
cities has not been common so far in geography books published in Japan, but it’s a very attractive and refreshing format for this readership.

Overall there seem to be two missed opportunities here. Maybe asking for the moon, I need an introductory chapter that covers the definition of the term ‘urban landscape’, currently ambiguous in this text’s format. In addition, as five volumes of ‘Geography of urban landscapes’ have already been published, a concluding remark which situates this book effectively in the series should have been given.

These omissions, however, do not detract from the purpose of this book. I am certainly pleased to have this book on my shelf as well as the previous volumes.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to Ms. Lesley Crowe-Delaney at Curtin University of Technology for her useful comments during the preparation of the English manuscript.

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