

WINFRIED FLÜCHTER: Stadtplanung in Japan. Problemhintergrund, gegenwärtiger Stand, kritische Bewertung. (Mitteilungen des Instituts für Asienkunde Hamburg, Nr. 97) Hamburg: Selbstverlag, 1978. 125 pages, DM 15.-

Although the extremely high density of population and industrial activities in Japan and the numerous problems related herewith are all too obvious to any sensitive visitor, not much has been written so far in German scientific literature on how city planning in Japan causes those problems and how it deals with them. There is some German literature in the field of Geography (esp. the publications by Peter Schöller), but nearly nothing from the point of view of city planning. As far as the reviewer is aware, Winfried Flüchter's small book is the first German monograph on city planning in modern Japan. It's not only this fact that makes the book recommendable, it's also the structure of the book and the author's convincing argumentation.

Flüchter starts with a brief historic survey of the development of city planning in Japan. Contrary to what many critics believe, city planning as a discipline has a fairly long tradition; however, history also shows that its impact on effectively structuring urban development has been rather uneven over time, and was probably at its lowest level in the period after the Second World War. It is in this period that the most serious problems have arisen: population concentration, industrial conglomeration, infrastructural deficiencies, land price explosion, urban sprawl, etc. Flüchter deals with these problems shortly but convincingly in the second chapter of the book.

It is shown, e. g. , that by 1975 nearly 60 % of the Japanese population, or 63.8 million people, were living in densely inhabited districts (DID-areas), with an average of about 8 000 people per square kilometre. These figures (esp. those on Tokyo) question most European or American standards on critical maxima of population density. Japan's post-war priorities on industrial growth meant that insufficient attention was given to an integrated development of the infrastructure; and once a high density of population had resulted as a consequence of industrial growth, infrastructure planning posed a threat to the built-up areas and the quality of urban life.

The land price index jumped from 100 in 1950 to 2 812 in 1974, and, thus put an end to liberal city planning as well as to private dwelling needs all too soon; either the demand for housing construction had to be postponed or plots were increasingly subdivided and urban sprawl extended. The "commuting hell" is one of the best known symptoms of this uncontrolled economic process and to many people illustrates the planner's weaknesses.

Flüchter's special interest is the "New City Planning Act" of 1968, its aims, measures and procedures. He critically evaluates the planning methodology and planning practice, especially with regard to zoning and building codes, land use, urban infrastructure, and the development of inner urban centres. The provision of "promotion areas" and "control areas" is examined, and the problems of coordinating city and regional planning are considered. The concluding chapter gives some indication of the differences between Japanese and European city planning.

All in all, Flüchter recognizes various improvements but characterizes Japanese city planning as working on a relatively inefficient level, especially for the following reasons: the post-war priorities on economic growth resulted in an imbalance between industry and city development; the rapidity of urban growth led the city planners to purely ad hoc policies; the strong influence of large private companies on city planning processes; the lack of authority of the city planners to determine aims and measures to carry out plans; the very strong feelings of the Japanese regarding property and homes which make it difficult to implement strict planning acts. Flüchter's conclusion, of course, is a plea for more efficient city planning, for new aims, measures and institutions.

The book is poor in respect of scientific literature. Numerous bibliographies<sup>1</sup>, monographs (e. g. R. P. Dore) and reports (e. g. the Robson reports on Tokyo) are not quoted. The list of international literature on urban development and city planning in Japan is not as short as Flüchter's references might suggest. Still, the book can be judged as a problem-oriented introduction to city planning in Japan, and could also be regarded as a sound basis for a collective effort for future comparative analysis of rapid urbanization, and the ways and means that can be successfully employed in coming to grips with that development.

Footnote:

- 1) Cf. e. g. the excellent bibliography by Diane Baerwald and Chizuko Saeki: *The Urban Way. A Guide to Research on Japanese Cities*, Ed. Mary Vance, Monticello/Ill. 1970.

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