

Simonis, Udo E.

Book Review — Digitized Version

[Rezension] Winfried Flüchter: Stadtplanung in Japan.
Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1978

Modern law and society: a review of German language research contributions on law, political science, and sociology / German studies, section II

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FLÜCHTER, WINFRIED

Town Planning in Japan

[“Stadtplanung in Japan”]

Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1978; 125 pp.

Although the extremely high density of population and industrial activity in Japan and the numerous problems related hereto are all too obvious to any sensitive visitor, not much has been written so far in the German academic literature on how city planning in Japan causes these problems and how it deals with them. There is some German literature in the geography sector (especially the publications by Peter Schöller, Bochum), but hardly anything from the point of view of city planning. As far as the reviewer is aware, Winfried Flüchter's short book is the first German monograph on city planning in modern Japan. It is not only this fact that makes the book recommendable, but also the disposition and the author's convincing argumentation.

Flüchter starts with a brief historical 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. Accidentally, this period produced most serious problems: population concentration, industrial conglomeration, infrastructural deficiencies, land price explosion, urban sprawl, etc. Flüchter deals with these problems briefly but convincingly in the second chapter of the book.

It is shown, for instance, that by 1975 nearly 60 % of the Japanese population, or nearly 64 million people, were living in densely inhabited districts (DID areas), with an average of about 8,000 people per square kilometre. These figures (especially those on Tokyo) render most European or American standards on critical maxima of population density rather odd. Japan's post-war priorities on industrial growth meant that insufficient attention was given to an integrated development of infrastructure; and when a rather high density of population had occurred as a consequence of industrial growth, infrastructure planning more or less 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 "community hell" is one of the known symptoms of this uncontrolled economic process and to many people illustrates the planners' weaknesses.

Flüchter's special interest is with 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 hints as to the differences between Japanese and European city planning.

All in all, Flüchter recognizes various improvements, but still 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 real authority of the city planners to determine aims and measures for carrying out the 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 effective city planning, for new aims, measures, and institutions.

The book is rather poor with regard to the academic literature used. Numerous bibliographies¹, monographs (e. g. Ronald P. Dore) and reports (e. g. the Robson reports on Tokyo) are not quoted. Even 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 a very good problem-oriented introduction to city planning in Japan, and could also be regarded as a sound basis for a future collective effort for comparative analysis of rapid urbanization, and the ways and means that can be employed to come to grips with that development.

Prof. Dr. Udo E. Simonis, Berlin