Large-Scale Urban Parks on Post-Industrial Sites in Contemporary Urban Landscape Conceptions
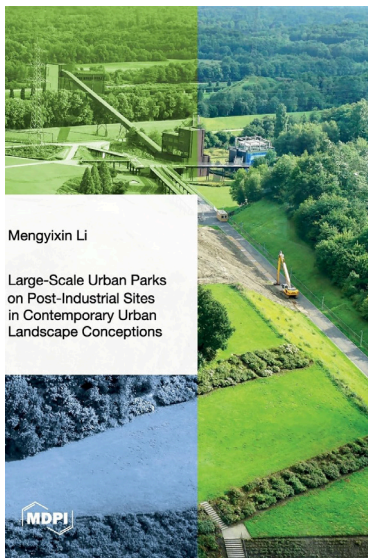
Too large to ignore, too full of history to erase. Once symbols of industrial strength, the rusted remains of factories, rail yards, and docklands now sit quietly across many cities. What happens when these spaces are turned into public parks instead of being redeveloped? Mengyixin Li, a landscape architect with a doctorate from the Technical University of Munich, explores how post-industrial sites can serve as spaces of memory, ecological repair, and cultural meaning. She connects theory and practice, asking how landscape architecture can transform space and reshape the stories cities tell about their past.

The 166-page book is divided into two parts. The first lays a complex theoretical foundation, introducing ideas such as collective memory, spatial identity, and ecological restoration. Li builds her argument on the work of figures like James Corner and Peter Latz, contrasting North American landscape urbanism with German landscape structuralism. She argues that large-scale parks act as instruments of cultural reflection, ecological process, and identity-building. The second part features five case studies from North America, Europe, and China: The High Line in New York, Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord, Houtan Park in Shanghai, and others. Each project is analysed in terms of design strategy, historical layers, and socio-political context. Li compares how different regions interpret industrial legacies and park-making, identifying regional models and cultural values. The comparative lens is especially strong, highlighting both shared concerns and diverse approaches.

Yet the book's ambition is also its limitation. The theoretical chapters are dense, with complicated language and long paragraphs introducing many ideas at once. Key points often get lost in detail, and the absence of diagrams or summaries makes orientation difficult. Li relies strongly on the ideas of Corner and Latz, placing Western perspectives at the center. Chinese examples often appear more as applications of these theories than as equal contributions, leaving the global comparison unbalanced. The case studies, while clearer and more engaging, remain selective. Iconic projects dominate, while smaller or less celebrated parks receive little attention that might have offered a broader picture. The analysis is largely author driven. Voices of designers, policymakers, or users are absent, leaving questions about lived experience unanswered.

Despite these issues, the book contributes valuable insights into how different cultures rethink post-industrial landscapes. Its strongest point is showing that parks are not just ecological spaces but places where cultural memory is expressed. At the same time, the heavy style of writing limits accessibility, making it most useful for researchers and advanced students rather than practitioners or the general public. In the end, Li offers a thoughtful but demanding account of how parks shape the future of cities while also helping them reflect on their past.

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