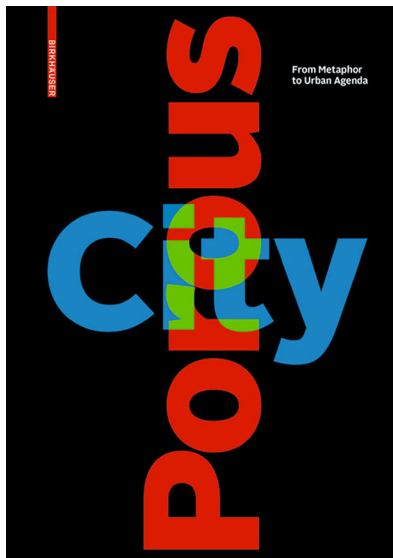


Porous City

From Metaphor to Urban Agenda

Editors: Sophie Wolfrum et al.

Publisher: Birkhäuser, Basel 2018



Modernism killed our cities. It robbed spaces of their multifunctionality and therefore urban life of decisive quality. Sophie Wolfrum, former professor of urban planning and her 66 co-authors refer to this quality of multifunctional spaces for free and spontaneous appropriation as *porosity*. According to the authors, understanding this concept is necessary for creating a progressive urban agenda.

The publication refers to an essay from 1925 by Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis. This is where the idea of the porous city as a literary metaphor began. With the term, the authors described the vibrant character of the city of Naples that comes from the merging of social and physical urban space. The book by Wolfrum was published in 2018 by the Department of Architecture at the Technical University of Munich. On 300 pages, the collection of 62 essays – some of them are written by author teams – tries to clarify what the construct of *porosity* means for urban planning. Authors from different professional backgrounds, such as urban design, architecture, landscape architecture, and the arts, convey their reflections on *porosity*. Occasionally, themes are illustrated with images, mostly photographs. The texts are sorted into six categories, namely *Reflections on the Term*, *Architecture & Urban Design*, *Producing Space & Acting*, *Urban Regulations & Planning*, *Urban Territoriality & Strategies* and *Detecting Porosity*.

The book not only illuminates the origin of the term, but the authors relate it to architecture and urban planning, which makes it easier to grasp. The essays help to develop typologies and an agenda for urban practice from the original metaphor. The work convinces above all by its careful examination of how porosity arises and how it can be promoted in public urban space and describes the associated fundamental, indispensable qualities for the city. One of the aims of the book was to illuminate its subject from different angles which it achieved, given the different disciplines of the authors. Nevertheless, having more than one text by a sociologist would have enriched the discourse even more, as the issue is strongly connected to social processes. With an educational background in landscape architecture, it seems that the issue of *porosity* is a matter of course in this discipline. This becomes clear when looking at the essays written by landscape architects, and it raises the question of whether *porosity* is an important term at all. In summary, the book delivers what it promises and proposes an agenda for the porous city of tomorrow.

The publication offers a comprehensible examination of the concept of *porosity*, its origins, and its importance for today's urban planning. Because of the interdisciplinarity of the matter, this book is also recommended for all professions involved. It encourages reflection on what constitutes urban life, where its quality lies and how the different professions must work together to do justice to the complexity of a porous city.

Review by Vanessa Baltés (28.08.2022)