Eric Firley and Katharina Groen (2013), *The Urban Masterplanning Handbook*  
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**Reviewed by:**  
Rosie Haslem  
Consultant, Space Syntax Ltd.  

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Eric Firley and Katharina Groen’s *The Urban Masterplanning Handbook* is the third in a series of publications which aim to act as reference tools for architects, planners and urban designers. Similar in style and structure to the previous two volumes in the series – *The Urban Housing Handbook* (2009) and *The Urban Towers Handbook* (2011) (both reviewed in JOSS Volume 2, Issue 2) – *The Urban Masterplanning Handbook* profiles 20 case studies from around the world, ranging from brownfield site renewals (False Creek North, Vancouver) to tabula rasa developments (Styvesant Town, New York) and urban extensions (Sarphatipark, Amsterdam).

The case study examples date from the early 1800s (London’s Belgravia) to schemes that are still ongoing today (Puerto Madero, Buenos Aires). However, eschewing chronology (and geography), Firley and Groen order the projects by scale. This structure aims to bring to light cross-historical and cross-geographical approaches to masterplanning a particular sized site in order to better enable design professionals to identify effective solutions for a project in question.

The book further stands out from typical catalogues of masterplan projects which focus upon final built form by instead emphasising the complexity of the ‘structures’ and ‘processes’ – such as planning control and funding, and changing landownership – through which this final built form emerges. Acknowledging the ambiguity of the term ‘masterplanning’, and thus defining it as ‘a framework that provides more or less detailed prescriptions for a specific development area’ (p.17, emphasis added), Firley and Groen bring to light how the interplay of differing levels of structural control and different stages of the design and implementation process result in a diverse catalogue of (evolving) masterplan morphologies.

The comprehensive case study texts which historically, politically and geographically contextualise each masterplan, are brought to life by Katharina Groen’s excellent graphics. As well as photographs and site maps, each case study is illustrated with scale aerial images and urban plans. Moreover, ‘process diagrams’ for each case study clearly chart the changing landownership and design evolution that are so central to the book’s conception of masterplanning. The clarity and consistency of these visual analyses enables systematic comparison across case studies. The comparative element is further enhanced by the Appendix, which contains a timeline, a density table, figure-ground diagrams, and a visually striking scale comparison of all projects. Together these give a simple yet comprehensive overview of all of the featured masterplans.

References