

Domen ZUPANČIČ

## Review of *Podoba mesta* (The Image of the City)

**Title of work:** Podoba mesta

**Original:** The Image of the City, MIT Press, 1960

**Author:** Kevin Lynch

**Translation:** Mija Peklenik

**Foreword:** Vladimir Braco Mušič

**Publisher:** Goga

**Editor of the Anagoga collection:** Irena Rožman

**Place and year of publication:** Novo Mesto, 2010

**Number of pages:** 227 pages

[ISBN 978-342-6321-42-8]

I'm holding the Slovenian translation of a book that has reshaped many methodological approaches to studying spatial design and teaching architecture the world over. A month ago, I was asked to write a review of Lynch's book and my mind took me back to my school years.

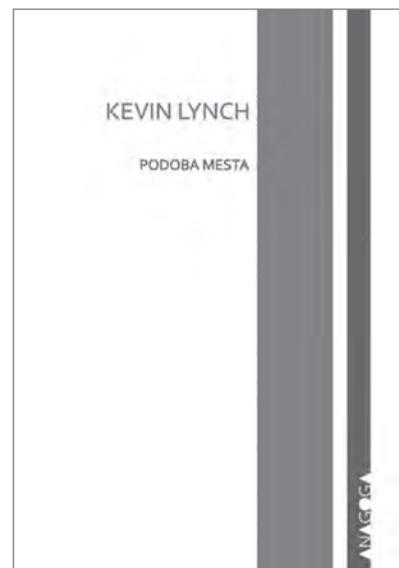
The foreword to the Slovenian translation was written by Vladimir B. Mušič, who outlined his views on the subject and reminded readers of his own urban solutions and designs. Although it is occasionally somewhat tedious when it references the many other works that might be important to the reader, the stories from Mušič's past are well placed and eventually gently lead the reader to (St.) Lynch.

I read the English book in my second year of studying architecture for my urban design course. I then got my hands on the Serbo-Croatian translation, a lousy copy of the book – the pictures were so smudged that I could only imagine what they were supposed to represent. Different approaches to translation are always interesting, so it was fun to read both versions at once.

When I think of Lynch and *The Image of the City*, I experience a Proustian flashback to Gordon Cullen and his book *The Concise Townscape*, which is adorned with lovely sketches of town walks – passing through the synapses of alleyways, shadows and town

squares. I read the books one after the other because they are similar in language, graphic notation of thought and theme. It was then that I irrevocably fell in love with the dance of ink on paper. The passion of the narrator, observer and imitator is like a tango on paper. This is also the method of teaching the etymology of architectural language. Lynch's book, which was mostly written in the mid-1950s, presented some key remarks on the spatial composition of cities using the example of an American metropolis. The concept of the metropolis is not physically present in Slovenia, which makes reading Lynch all the more interesting when he describes the districts and conditions in three major American cities.

Lynch speaks of *america*. Yes, un-capitalised. He mostly writes of the spatial awareness of the citizens of three metropolises: Los Angeles, Boston and Jersey City. He and his team – in the foreword he mentions his colleague György Kepes from the Center for Urban and Regional Studies at MIT and many other co-workers – deal with the topic of urban or spatial design. In *The Image of the City*, an ironclad terminology is given: paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. Lynch's terminology is clear, simple, without haughty *-isms*, conceptuality, contextualism or other hard-to-grasp expressions that I've never fully understood. That is one of the reasons I loved his book: he used lan-



guage as a tool for communication and not as a medium of communicativeness.

Lynch emphasises his conclusions with many monochromatic sketches, most of which are quite simple, but still telling. The little sketches next to the text look like postage stamps. They remind me of a herbarium, like little flowers of the metropolis. The other segment of sketches is reminiscent of microscopic images of cells, tendons and membranes. That part is puzzling and difficult.

The original version and the translation are similar in format – they're roughly 13 cm wide by 20 cm high. They're both black-and-white and combine sketches with halftones. The book's format is interesting and useful because you can put it in your jacket pocket and take it with you to a terrace overlooking the city. There you can open it, learn from it and check it against the city below at the same time. However, the clumsy arrangement makes the sketches too small and illegible – a weakness already present in the original, and made worse in the Slovenian translation by the unfortunate choice of paper. The district maps come equipped with a remarkably picturesque compass rose. What's sadly missing from the Slovenian version is a sensible editorial check of the text and graphic elements before print.

Authors of such stature are usually untouchable, and the translations are generally overly cautious copies of the originals. However, despite the fact that the original itself is not exactly rich in clear captions below the sketches and legible text within them, the Slovenian editor could have done a better job of overcoming the original's shortcomings. The sketches are occasionally lost in the text; of course they clearly refer to the content found in a nearby paragraph, but the sketches would need a title of their own or a caption explaining what they represent. For example, the caption under Figure 28 "Roundabout on Charles Street" (page 98): is it in Boston or elsewhere? Of course it's in Boston; I should have read the text. Reading letters that are only 0.7 mm high (i.e., those on the sketches of Boston, page 187, Figure 48: "Image of Boston, based on street interviews"), is painstaking – I digitised the entire thing and read out the font size with CAD software. Such inconveniences are increasingly frequent towards the end of the book (addenda). However, the jewel in the crown of this transla-

tion is the quote from Marcel Proust on page 157. Clearly Lynch read *Du côté de chez Swann* (1954) and the translator must know the Slovenian translation of the work (the interpretation and re-interpretation from 1963, DZS, and later versions in 1970, 1987, 1996 and 2004), and so the Slovenian translation would have gained wider cultural resonance had Proust's summary been based on the Slovenian version.

The Slovenian translation is clearly a conservation process – the original is adhered to as closely as possible. However, should a translation really be merely a translation? The Slovenian edition had the option of exceeding the conservation frame and entering the field of reconstruction of the book's contents – that is, the field of architecture or, rather, spatial design. It would be very interesting to see pictures of those same streets, roundabouts and parks taken today or a few years back. Is the view down Chestnut Street from Charles Street (Boston, of course) still the same as it was? Of course, such an approach would take more time, will

and effort from all those involved, but the result could have been incredible. I dare say such a version of Lynch would echo beyond borders and the Slovenian edition might itself have been translated into other languages. Would that not be a worthy reinterpretation of the reconstruction of the original? That is what architecture, urbanism and spatial design are.

The Slovenian translation, *Podoba mesta* (2010), stays conservatively true to the fifty-year-old original, *The Image of the City* (1960). The book is as irreplaceable as a ficus tree in a secretary's office. Its simple design and clear narration ensures it a special place in the mandatory reading of future spatial designers, architects and many other experts in spatial management. All that remains is for me to wish the Slovenian book many satisfied readers.

[Translated by Lucija Kelbl]

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## Review of *Globalizacija bogatí in/ali ogroža?* (Does Globalisation Offer Enrichment and/or a Threat?)

**Title:** *Globalizacija bogati in/ali ogroža?*

**Author:** Zdravko Mlinar

**Reviewers:** Jan Makarovič and Rudi Rizman

**Publisher:** Faculty of Social Sciences and the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts

**Place and year of publication:** Ljubljana, 2012

**Number of pages:** 482 pages

[ISBN 978-961-235-576-0]

*Globalizacija bogati in/ali ogroža?* (Does Globalisation Offer Enrichment and/or a Threat?) is the latest book by academy member Zdravko Mlinar, the founder of spatial sociology and a pioneer in studying globalisation in Slovenia. This is the second book from the author's trilogy *Živiljenjsko okolje v globalni informacijski dobi* (The Living Environment

in the Global Information Age); the book titled *Prostorsko-časovna organizacija bivanja* (The Spatial-Chronological Organisation of Living) was already published as part of this trilogy in 2008.

According to the reviewers, *Globalizacija bogati in/ali ogroža?* offers the most comprehensive social study of globali-



sation issues in Slovenia to date. The author presents its content in seven extensive chapters: Sociological Premises and Social Context, Globalisation and Transformation of the Territorial Or-