

BOOK REVIEWS

Chavan, Abhijeet, Christian Peralta and Christopher Steins, eds.

Planetizen Contemporary Debates in Urban Planning.

Washington: Island Press, 2007.

183 pp.

ISBN: 1597261335

Planetizen Contemporary Debates in Urban Planning presents sweeping coverage of major planning topics selected from the *Planetizen* website. As Neal Peirce writes in the forward, the collection tackles the question of whether or not the historic pendulum has swung from suburbanization to compact cities in America. The editors argue that the “scales have tipped,” and that an historic movement towards cities is under way. Their book is therefore intended to provide professionals and citizens with a deeper understanding of that historic change. Since part of that change has been the emergence of *Planetizen* as an electronic forum for the planning community, the book consists of twenty-six 3-4 page commentaries taken from the website, many of them followed by reader responses.

The first set of 7 essays considers “Sprawl vs. Smart Growth.” Anthony Flint makes the opening argument for Smart Growth, contending that it will increase affordable housing while reducing infrastructure and commuting costs. This view is opposed by a set of interesting arguments focusing on the merits of single-family suburban homes. First, Wendell Cox makes a free market argument that suburban housing is good both economically and socially, and is not the source of central city decline. Harriet Tregoning presents her research predicting an oversupply of single-family suburban homes if Smart Growth is successful. Randall O’Toole expands the economic debate by arguing that single-family homes are engines of economic growth, contending that most small start-up businesses are financed by second home mortgages. Joel Kotkin presents a compromise, “New Suburbanism,” based largely on the New Town experiments in the 1960s in Columbia, Reston and the Woodlands. Bill Fulton argues that the real force driving sprawl in California has been the post-Proposition 13 competition among local governments for higher tax base developments like auto malls. This section also includes a new view from Michael Woo, both a former Los Angeles City Councilmember and planner, pointing out that the new boom in high-density apartments and condominiums in downtown Los Angeles presents a logical opportunity for

Canadian Journal of Urban Research, Volume 17, Issue 1, Supplement pages 101-109.

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ISSN: 1188-3774

Smart Growth. This section has a balanced selection of representative arguments on the topics and presents some interesting new ideas. It uses reader responses and author rebuttals well, framing what turns out to be a surprisingly civil debate.

The "Transportation" section includes a variety of policy proposals and reports on specific projects. It includes articles on pedestrian-friendly community standards, pricing proposals for parking and highways, as well as an article by Kenneth Kruckemeyer proposing the expansion of alternatives to the automobile to include not only bicycles, but also Segways™, scooters and skateboards. The section concludes with a report by Michael Mehaffy on the Portland Orenco Station Transit Oriented Development (TOD), providing a progress report on the actual implementation of a TOD within the context of the Oregon regional planning law. This section features a less comprehensive selection of proposals than the first, and while it brings important policy alternatives to the collection, it does not add to the debate that is central to the book's stated purpose.

The reader looking to the section on "Urban Design" for an exciting debate on New Urbanism will be disappointed. Andres Duany's article lists his proposed principles for the renewal of architecture as a profession, without a serious reference to New Urbanism. Christopher DeWolf's argument against New Urbanism is his "Why New Urbanism Fails," although he quickly compromises on it in response to the selected reader comments. The section is completed by an essay on mixed-use and public facilities by Alexander Garvin; Jeff Speck's article listing ten proposed urban design standards based on the Mayor's Institute on City Design; and an article on Urban Parks by Fred Kent. While important articles, they also avoid joining the major debates in urban design.

Sidestepping the debate on New Urbanism, which the editors acknowledge to be "a polarizing force" (p. 74), is a major gap in an otherwise thorough collection. Rather than presenting the actual views of the partisans in that polarized debate, the editors have chosen to summarize the arguments for and against New Urbanism, neotraditionalism and green building in their introduction to this section. This is a departure from the treatment of the other topic areas in the book, which feature essays by the players in those debates.

A section on Disaster Planning includes "Recovering New Orleans" by Thomas Campanella, and the "End of Tall Buildings" by James Howard Kunstler and Nikos Salingaros, predicting changes in high rise planning after 9-11. A summary of the practical issues in post-disaster planning by Robert B. Olshansky puts the more theoretical articles in a practical light. The section is complemented by a short article by Ed Blakely arguing against the further fortification of American cities as a response to 9-11, based on his work on gated communities. This section is an acknowledgement of the importance of 9-11 and New Orleans to urban planning, and also reflects the work that remains to be done in response to terrorism and global warming.

The last section on “Society and Planning” confronts the issues of gentrification and the Libertarian response to planning in a balanced set of lively debates. John Norquist, representing the Congress for New Urbanism, frames the gentrification argument by asserting that “the gentry threat is grossly exaggerated” (p. 147). Charles Shaw responds that not only is gentrification real, but it is based on racism and the intentional creation of “two-class city-states” (p. 153). Balancing that conflict is an article by Constance Beaumont proposing locating schools in walkable neighbourhoods, to stabilize the same neighborhoods that are at the centre of the gentrification debate.

This section concludes with a presentation of the Libertarian critique of planning in the form of a transcript of a *Planetizen* email debate on the Lone Mountain Compact, which opposed comprehensive or centralized planning as violations of private property rights. The conflict between Libertarians and planners has been heightened by the recent US Supreme Court’s *Kelo vs. City of New London* decision, which upheld the use of eminent domain for private urban redevelopment projects. Samuel Staley’s article concludes that the *Kelo* decision ignores Constitutional civil liberties and gave planners unlimited power. The editors argue that Libertarians, New Urbanist and Smart Growth advocates have become reluctant allies in seeking reduced regulation, although the views of the “reluctant allies” in New Urbanism are not included in this set of essays.

This set of articles does a good job of illustrating why Libertarians believe that the only avenue to protect property rights from planners is direct democracy, such as the many voter initiatives appearing regularly in state elections. Thus, this last section frames the debate over the future of planning, and which direction the “urban pendulum” might swing next.

The volume does not contain references for further research, which limits its usefulness for an advanced course. It is also limited by relying solely on 3-4 page articles designed to fit on a web page, rather than those found in scholarly or professional publications. And its cautious coverage of New Urbanism is a limitation.

However, this is an interesting and thorough collection of essays that would be a good candidate for a reader in an introductory urban planning or urban studies course, as an introduction to basic urban planning issues, and for use as topics for class discussion.

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Hackworth, Jason

The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology and Development in American Urbanism.

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.

205 pp.

ISBN: 9780801473036 (pbk)

In this readable book Jason Hackworth provides an account of how redevelopment in American cities over the last thirty years may be understood as a 'spatial fix' easing the transition from a Keynesian to neoliberal approach to economic governance. Left unqualified such a description might suggest a mechanistic, functional explanation, but that would do the book a gross injustice. Hackworth emphasises that neoliberalism cannot be understood as a juggernaut rolling out over cities (and countries) in a uniform manner, creating a homogeneous economic and socio-political landscape. On the contrary, one of the book's central arguments is that there is a 'spatial contingency' (p. 173) to neoliberal cities, inasmuch as a city's distinctiveness (in terms of its history/ies, cultures, institutions etc.) will affect how it has responded to—and in turn has helped shape—the economic and political forces extending beyond its boundaries.

The book is in three parts, prefaced by an introductory chapter which does the useful job of discussing briefly just what neoliberalism is, and isn't. Part one of the book then considers, in three chapters, how neoliberalism has influenced the nature of urban governance in US cities. Two of the chapters incorporate different aspects of the declining significance of the nation state in urban governance as compared to both international and sub-national institutions. What Hackworth refers to as the 'upscaling' of governance (p. 41) is illustrated by the growing influence of credit agencies, while 'downscaling' is exemplified by the changing nature of public housing provision in US cities. For the latter, short case studies effectively show spatial variations in the way neoliberal trends in public housing provision have played out. The third chapter discusses the nature of urban regimes, demonstrating how local coalitions of interest can (and should) be understood in terms of their role in mediating the structural changes in capitalist economies in different places.

The book's second part is its longest. In four chapters Hackworth looks at spatial patterns of investment/development from the project to metropolitan scale. A particularly interesting chapter looks at the changing nature of gentrification in recent decades including the ways in which corporate investment has become more significant than bohemian pioneers in defining the gentrified frontier of inner areas of cities.

The final part considers how neoliberalism has been questioned and contested. Hackworth is acutely sensitive to the varying successes experienced by opposition to neoliberal projects. He provides a sober, but not dispiriting, analysis of the

fractured opposition to an approach to governance which many powerful economic and political interests believe cannot be allowed to fail. The book ends—in a laudably radical fashion—by highlighting oppositional practices which can provide guidance and hope for a more developed contestation of neoliberalism in the future.

While not shying away from acknowledging the astonishing ascendancy of neoliberalism in much of the world, the book tries hard to avoid any hint of historical inevitability. I suspect that judgements as to how successful Hackworth is in providing the nuanced account for which he strives may vary according to the theoretical and political disposition of the reader. I for example—admiring (and influenced by) the work of David Harvey and Neil Smith—found myself broadly sympathetic to the author. Others might prefer a few more pages—and fuller case studies—devoted to the nature of local circumstances so that they could be assured that the book is not presenting these as some kind of ‘noise’ which muddies, but does not fundamentally alter, the essentially top-down economic dynamic of capitalist cities.

This book is likely to be particularly useful for students of urban geography and urban studies. Researchers, too, will enjoy reading such a clearly-written and lucidly-argued book, though some of the material may be familiar, in part from the author’s earlier work.

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Harper, Thomas L. and Stanley M. Stein

Dialogical Planning in a Fragmented Society: Critically Liberal, Pragmatic, Incremental.

350 pp.

New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Urban Policy Research – CUPR Press, 2006.

ISBN: 0882851799 (paper)

Harper and Stein have always occupied a unique place among planning theorists. While others reinterpret planning in light of the major philosophical currents of the time—notably post-modernism—Harper and Stein provide a normative outlook on planning in its current form and adduce philosophical ideas to support their view. They subscribe to the fundamentals of contemporary planning, but are equally committed to the enhancement of planning practice. Their enterprise consists in clarifying the purpose of planning and raising the calibre of debates within the profession by drawing from the neo-pragmatist

school of philosophy, and most particularly the works of Richard Rorty, Richard Bernstein and Hilary Putnam. Compared with that of other theorists, their purpose is indeed pragmatic: to make use of philosophical reflection to improve planning processes and outcomes.

Dialogical Planning is a very personal book, as it relates the philosophical explorations of Harper and Stein over a fifteen-year period. The remarkable intellectual consistency of the two authors assures the coherence of the book. It incorporates eleven contributions published between 1992 and 2005. But the book does not merely reproduce these articles and chapters: it blends them in a nearly seamless fashion. The only remaining sign of the origin of its content are occasional repetitions, which are not unwelcome given the intensity of the text. Readers will be grateful for the presence of a glossary, and for the shortness of the sections, which help the absorption of the book's rich content.

Harper and Stein steer a middle course between polar approaches to planning, both of which they reject. They dismiss modernism for its reductionism, which they see as utterly maladapted to the multi-faceted nature of social reality. In their view, the positivism and utilitarianism of the rational comprehensive model, responsible for some of the misguided planning interventions of the 1950s and 1960s, illustrate the perils of modernism. At the other end of the spectrum, the authors are equally critical of what they perceive as the exaggerated relativism and lack of points of reference of post-modernism. They see post-modernism as incompatible with the project of planning, a barrier to the shared values needed to legitimate a course of action. Harper and Stein opt instead for a form of planning that is embedded in the values of liberal society, but which would benefit from philosophical contributions of the neo-pragmatist school of thought, attempting to make it more democratic, participatory and equitable.

Along the course of the argument we encounter friends and foes. Friends include Rawls, Melzer, Lindblom and Habermas. They provide perspectives on incremental patterns of evolution, equitable outcomes and on the values that should undergird the planning process. Habermas and Rawls also contribute the exploration of conditions favourable to the attainment of an unconstrained social consensus. On the other side of the fence are authors and movements whose viewpoints contradict the style of planning championed by the book. This is the case with Foucault and his followers (for whom power relations pervade all social relations and override values); the deep ecologists, (who subordinate all aspects of society to the environmental imperative); and multi-culturalism, a possible barrier to consensus-building.

What is most appealing about the perspective developed by Harper and Stein is the identification and celebration of the positive aspects of liberal society. Theirs is a cautious approach that singles out the features of our social system that deserve additional influence. Of course, a further contribution is the identification

of the present and potential role of planning within this society. By attempting a constructivist treatment of contemporary social structures and planning, they break from the highly critical tone that pervades planning theory.

There are three main issues with the book. First, the litmus test of any social theory consists in its ability to add fresh meaning to social reality, by identifying a hitherto overlooked aspect of this reality or providing new interpretations. Despite the introduction of six planning case studies, the reader cannot tell if the perspective presented in the book passes the test or not. The case studies are too short and the object of insufficient interpretation to illustrate how the Harper-Stein approach further elucidates social reality. Second, it is legitimate to ask why a certain type of planning merits the attention of philosophers so as to be improved as a result of their reflection. What are the values and processes embedded within this form of planning that justify such a treatment? The book touches on this matter by alluding to universal values but lacks a systematic investigation of the positive aspects of contemporary planning that warrant this attention. Finally, by virtue of its adherence to incrementalism, the proposed approach is inherently conservative. It may be true that such an approach is suited to the workings of the existing institutional structures of liberal society, but what if radical environmentalists are right and the planet is in such peril that many present societal tendencies need to be immediately reversed?

Despite these concerns, this is a major contribution to planning theory. It offers an inquiry that takes root in planning practice and blossoms into an original theoretical perspective on planning, which stands out among the two or three major schools of thought that dominate the field. The book is not for everyone, however; *Dialogical Planning* assumes prior knowledge of philosophy and planning theory.

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Review Essay

Homer-Dixon, Thomas

The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity and the Renewal of Civilizations.

Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2006.

429 pp.

ISBN: 9780676977226

Hague, Cliff, Patrick Wakely, Julie Crespin and Chris Jako

Making Planning Work: A Guide to Approaches and Skills.

Rugby, Warwickshire: Intermediate Technology Publications, 2006.

104 pp.

ISBN: 9781853396489

An important role for planners (and planning academics) is keeping a broad perspective—bringing an awareness of the future and the global into the planning process. It is very easy for politicians and planners to become absorbed in the complex minutiae of daily decision-making which often obscures a broader vision. These two books are a wonderful antidote to such absorption.

Thomas Homer-Dixon first invites us to take a long-term perspective on forces which create catastrophes and determine the fate of nations and cultures. He also helps us to recognize how intertwined are the fates of contemporary cultures in terms of crucial inter-related global “tectonic” stresses: population, energy, climate, environment and land, and economic disparity.

Population: high population growth in poorer countries in the Global South and low growth in richer northern ones means that not only will most future growth be urban, but that it will be concentrated in the mega-cities of the less-affluent Global South.

Energy: usable energy is coming from higher and higher cost sources—the net energy yield is declining (it takes more and more energy to get new energy, e.g. oil production from oil sands requires the use of more energy than drilling oil wells).

Environment and land: current consumption levels are unsustainable; resources which are international “common pool resources” (e.g. fisheries) are most immediately endangered. *Climate:* recent global warming has been more rapid than predicted. *Economic disparity:* as national economies become more interconnected, global economic instability increases.

As the gap between rich and poor grows, both local and global economic instability increases. Further complicating matters, there is a danger of synchronous and interactive changes in these areas of stress: Simultaneous disasters in two of these stressed arenas could trigger crises in others; crises in one region quickly flow to other parts of the globe.

However, Homer-Dixon suggests a decline in civilization is not inevitable: There are creative ways of responding to crises by which our contemporary civilization could renew itself. But the starting point is awareness of the forces creating the crises.

Such awareness of global forces as advocated by Homer-Dixon drives *Making Planning Work*, which reflects the themes of the World Planners Congress (WPC) and the World Urban Forum (WUF) both of which were held in Vancouver in June of 2006. In particular, it elaborates on the practical implications of the articles of the *Vancouver Declaration 2006*. The (British-based) authors sound a call for planning to re-invent itself as the “New Urban Planning” (NUP), as central to a new paradigm for governance of human settlements.

New Urban Planning is encapsulated in ten principles: *sustainability* (environmental, economic, social); *integration of planning* (of all types); *integration of budgets and plans*; *planning with partners* (including other levels of government, private sector, voluntary agencies and civil society); *responsiveness to non-governmental actors* (in a process of good governance, rather than top-down management and direction); *subsidiarity* (decentralization to local governments and empowerment of community-based organizations); *responsiveness to markets*; *access to land* (equitable systems of land ownership and land management which recognize the reality of existing slums and informal settlements, and the rights of their residents, and which facilitate upgrading); *appropriate development control tools* (strategic, affordable, effective, sensitive to the poor while conserving ecological resources,); *pro-poor and inclusive* (recognition of diversity and promotion of equality for those whose voices have often not been heard—e.g., the old, children, the disabled, women, ethnic minorities, the homeless, the poor); and *cultural variation* (outcomes and approaches dependent on local cultural priorities and preferences).

The authors argue that NUP should work in cooperation with civil society, private sector, informal sector, and indigenous groups. To encourage practical application, the book enumerates the skills necessary for such engagement, and includes 24 case studies from around the world that illustrate both the potential and the great challenges of implementing this “new” approach to planning.

To be effective, NUP should be proactive, focusing on sustainability, yet also facilitating economic opportunity, especially for the poor. This dual emphasis provides “the ethical basis of the New Urban Planning.” They stress that the planning needed is not the old “Town Planning” (or what North Americans would think of as the “Rational Comprehensive”) model.

For a planning theorist, it is most gratifying to see practitioners addressing themselves to other practitioners echoing themes which have been so prevalent in theory over the past three decades. Every planner should be cognizant of the concerns raised by these books, and seek to focus the attention of other planners, politicians and citizens on these concerns.

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