

Stiftel, Bruce and Vanessa Watson (Eds)

Dialogues in Urban and Regional Planning 1

London: Routledge, 2005.

355 pp.

ISBN: 0-415-34693-2

Planning journals that enjoy an international status mostly carry studies originating from a select group of first world countries; as a result the international distribution of planning-related knowledge is far from being unbiased. To remedy this, nine national and international groupings of planning schools (including the Association of Canadian University Planning Programs) have launched a new series, the precise purpose of which is to create a genuine international forum of ideas on planning issues. The chapters collected in *Dialogues in Urban and Regional Planning*, the first volume in this series, were subjected to a rigorous selection process, and it shows. Having first been nominated by a national or international association of planning schools, and then selected by an editorial board, the twelve chapters are of an exceptional quality.

Two chapters stand out for the originality of their perspectives. The first, by Henri Acselrad, investigates the measures the Government of Brazil has taken to protect the environment of the Amazon region. There are two key aspects to this protective effort, both sources of adverse consequences despite a laudable purpose. One is an elaborate zoning system, which threatens the traditional life and culture of nomads, and the other is an ongoing reliance on satellite-based remote sensing to detect illegal fires and mining operations. The singular conceptual contribution of the chapter lies in the link it forges between the Amazonian experience and Foucault's interpretation of the surveillance and control associated with 'panoptism', a concept inherited from the eighteenth century.

The other chapter is by Leonie Sandercock. It explores the role of stories within the planning process. The chapter underscores the remarkable capacity stories have of transmitting information and invites planners to develop the capacity to use and interpret storytelling when interacting with their publics. Perhaps the key warning of this chapter is that universal myths that populate stories—the lost paradise, for example—can seep unnoticed into planning discourses, which would suggest the influence of a collective unconscious as defined by Karl Jung or Bruno Bettelheim.

Canadian content is well-represented within the collection; three contributions (including that of Leonie Sandercock) are by Canadian planners. Jill Grant explores the difficulty of creating mixed-use developments in Canadian cities, a timely issue given current attempts at achieving smart growth. She demonstrates that while residential densities are rising, the objectives of mixing income groups and of blending retailing and workplaces with housing have remained elusive. The

chapter also documents factors sustaining an ongoing functional and social segregation. The final Canadian contribution is by Tazim B. Jamal, Stanley M. Stein and Thomas L. Harper, and deals with a multiple stakeholder planning process concerning the Banff National Park. An examination of the process reveals that ideologically-driven positions and a reliance on labels ('environmental groups', the 'business community') can have an impeding effect on decision-making in planning. The authors respond by championing a pragmatic approach, which concentrates narrowly on the practical issues at stake—perhaps the planning equivalent of 'realpolitik'.

Without an overarching theme, the purpose of the collection is unclear. It is all very well to group excellent contributions from different parts of the world; but whom, apart from conscientious reviewers, will read from cover to cover a book made of chapters that bear little relation to each other? How many readers, for instance, share an interest in both the economics of urban development in South America and the shortcomings of critical theory as an organizing principle for planning processes? A concluding chapter that drew out the main perspectives voiced in the chapters, and reflecting on how they illustrate international trends, would have been consistent with the purpose of the book; but this would have been difficult, given that these contributions have been selected for their individual quality, not for their representation of national or regional distinctions in matters of planning-related research.

What is more, the intent of the book—to bring to the attention of readers international works to which they would not normally have access—is only partially fulfilled. Only three of the twelve contributions needed to be translated in English. And, at \$130.00 (US) the book may be seen as inordinately expensive considering that most of the English-language articles are easily accessible from other sources.

Pierre Filion
School of Planning
University of Waterloo