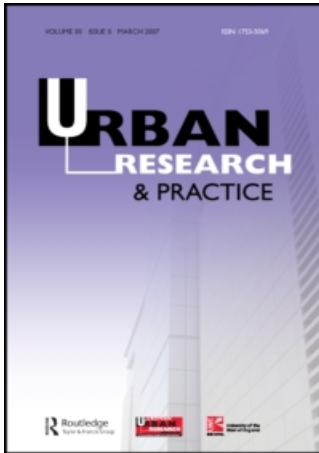


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Book reviews

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Book reviews

Dialogues in urban and regional planning, Vol. 2, edited by Bruce Stiftel, Vanessa Watson and Henri Acselrad, London Routledge, 2007, 369 pp, £80.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-415-40285-9

This book follows an earlier volume on a similar theme, and it is published in association with the Global Planning Education Association Network (GPEAN) and the nine planning school associations it represents. The book aims to compare planning research, and implications for planning practice, across boundaries of language, geography and cultural difference. The chapters in the book have been selected from papers nominated by the various associations of planning schools, so as to represent a truly global perspective.

The introductory chapter considers themes that run throughout the book. In particular, it proposes the need to redefine boundaries between analytical categories as applied to spatial planning – for instance in terms of local–global, rural–urban, economic–political and formal–informal. It also identifies tensions between culture and planning, formal and informal democracy, and economic versus environmental planning. This chapter also summarises other themes reflected in the book, including heritage conservation, the development of planning ideas, planning and transport, and planning and gender. In addition, it stresses the key issues of language and citation, which the comparative approach of the book brings into sharp relief. In terms of language, it shows how there is a dominance of spatial planning literature in English, which unfortunately excludes a large section of global planning thought. This presents a problem, since one of the major propositions of the book is that there is the potential for fruitful interchange in planning experience and thought across national and regional boundaries. In terms of citation within planning literature, again the chapter illustrates a major problem since citations are remarkably regional-specific, with the United States and Europe in particular tending to cite overwhelmingly within their own boundaries. In spite of, and perhaps because of, such factors, the chapter suggests that cross-national comparative research can be beneficial, but also that regional specificity is needed so that the importance of context is recognised. Nevertheless, the chapter concludes that there is widespread evidence of regional isolation in spatial planning research, again linked to issues of language and citation, since for instance researchers often have difficulty accessing material from other regions and in other languages.

The remaining 12 chapters deal with specific themes or aspects of spatial planning in very different contexts, and vary significantly in approach and content. For instance, some chapters take an explicitly comparative approach by making clear links between different contexts. Hence, in chapter 3, Elias Beriatos and Aspa Gospodini consider the potential legacy of the Olympic Games in Athens in the context of identity, image and place-branding. Making use of a comparison with the largely positive experience of Barcelona, they argue that, in Athens, in spite of the opportunities created by the Games, there are several shortcomings in the approach taken in terms of lack of use of brownfields, and dispersal of facilities. In addition, Robert Freeston in chapter 10 sets out the American influences on Australian planning practice, with the implication for the need to recognise difference rather than simply transfer ideas.

Moreover, several chapters look in detail at a particular planning issue in one context, with implications for practice elsewhere. For instance, in chapter 2, Thomas Hutton examines the reshaping of the metropolitan core of Vancouver as an example of what he calls 'advanced post-modernity', exhibiting social and cultural heterogeneity and progressive urban design. In addition, Nirita Samadhi in chapter 6 considers the specific issue of cultural identity in Balinese cities, showing how urban design can be used to enhance such cultural identity, as well as to maintain a sense of place. These largely positive experiences may be contrasted with chapter 4, in which Jaque Donzelot considers Paris as a '3-speed city' demonstrating marginalisation, periurbanisation and gentrification. Furthermore, a potent critique of democratic practice in Victoria, Australia is provided in chapter 7, in which Alan March and Nicholas Low use insights from Habermas to show the need to promote democracy within planning, since working within the current process in Victoria will, they suggest, promote undemocratic planning. They therefore propose the need to look beyond participation in spatial planning decisions to the need to address the fundamental structural inadequacy of the system of democracy. Other chapters consider issues such as integrated development plans in South Africa and their potential for achieving sustainable regional development; links between traffic increases, road investment and real estate development in the United States; and gender issues in a self-build housing development in Botswana.

Another set of chapters consider cross-cutting themes that apply across many contexts. Hence, for instance, Jose Eli da Veiga in chapter 5 considers rurality under conditions of globalisation, showing how the predictions of Levebvre and Keyser have not been demonstrated, with instead a variety of conditions of rurality becoming evident, including for instance 'deep rural' and 'adjacent rural'. In addition, Alicia Novich in chapter 11 looks at how urban planning was addressed in twentieth-century histories of the city.

The book therefore covers a considerable variety of issues across a truly global context, and it provides many insights that are of clear relevance and applicability in contexts far removed from where they were conceived. However, the book appears rather fragmented, in spite of the valuable introductory chapter. This seems to be in part a result of a lack of grouping of chapters with similar approaches or themes, as well as a lack of a concluding chapter that could tie together some of the cross-cutting themes raised in the introduction. Nevertheless, the book is to be commended as a means of emphasising and demonstrating the value of consideration of research and practice in other global contexts, and also in taking an uncompromising approach to addressing the insular nature of much research. It therefore gives a valuable insight into the concerns of global planning scholarship communities, and it will be of interest to all those concerned with cross-national planning research and the internationalisation of planning research and education.

John McCarthy

School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, UK

Email: j.p.mccarthy@sbe.hw.ac.uk

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Urban complexity and spatial strategies: towards a relational planning for our times, by Patsy Healey, New York, Routledge, 2007, 328 pp, £27.00 (Paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-38035-5.

The roots of Patsy Healey's latest book have to be placed within her intellectual excursus during the last two decades, throughout which she has been developing her 'institutionalist'

approach to governance and planning in making places. *Urban Complexity and Spatial Strategies* is an attempt to update some theoretical and conceptual assumptions that the author has already stated in her earlier book, *Collaborative Planning* (1997), a book providing a wide interpretative and nonpositivist approach to planning, under the pressure of new economic and social challenges given by changes in the urban dimension.

During the last decade, European cities have become privileged places of governance evolution. On the one hand, the new political economy of cities and urban regions has created new relationships among global and local players, from Europe to neighbourhoods. On the other, in urban areas changes such as the ‘. . . socio-cultural shift in material welfare, in demographic movements, in lifestyle expectation and attitudes to the city, to nature, to diversity and difference, to materiality and identity . . .’ (p. 172) is occurring faster than elsewhere, pushing actors to establish different and dynamic relations not only among themselves but also with space and places.

Urban Complexity and Urban Strategy provides a full account of how all these multiple dynamics may interact and change the governance landscape of urban regions, bringing together ‘. . . empirical histories of evolving practices . . .’ (p. XI) with concepts and suggestion for enriching the interpretive vocabulary of planning and providing a deeper social foundation for its future role.

The book could be divided into three sections responding to different methodological tasks. The first section, including chapters 1 and 2, sets out issues concerning the methodology adopted, highlighting in particular the meaning of such controversial concepts and relations as governance and places, governance and planning, and how governance specifically may operate in different contexts – such as the ‘urban region’ – which should not be considered merely in functional terms. Presenting the empirical work, Healey particularly stresses the ‘relational perspective’ through which the case studies have been carried out, and their evolving ‘spatial strategy-making’ as a typical governance activity influenced by several, unique, social and political conditions.

The case studies in chapters 3, 4 and 5 are presented in the form of a narrative, as a collection of major episodes of spatial strategy running from the mid twentieth century to the early 2000s in three, very different, European urban regions. Amsterdam has been a model in the planning literature for a long time, a place where the spatial strategies have traditionally been addressed by the public sector, with the financial support of the state and under the control of the city council. Healey discusses how the recent debate on the city’s spatial strategy-making and governance reflects the relationship between a traditional conception of planning that seeks to provide liveable environments and accessible services, and the new challenges to be faced in reinforcing the city’s role in the region and the global economy.

The post-war history of Milan’s planning and governance illustrates the lack of a comprehensive vision of the urban development compared to the Dutch case. This is not the effect, in the words of Healey, of a weakness of civic society (Milan is undoubtedly a vital city, from both cultural and economic points of view); rather, it reflects the difficulty in ‘summoning up’ driving forces from the local milieu and creating a public arena in which to debate the city’s future. A partial and flexible approach to urban regeneration has dominated for decades, and only in recent years has there been a new effort to reimagine the city and its regional development, now considered a crucial issue.

The chapter on the Cambridge Sub-Region is about the outstanding power of local forces in maintaining ideas such as local identity and in promoting objectives (such as the conservation of valued landscape, the compact city and containing urban sprawl), able to

influence the developing conception of a dynamic urban region. In contrast to many other parts of the UK, it may be considered a planning success story, thanks to the capacity of local politicians and stakeholders to take initiatives that could influence the development of spatial strategy from both the national level and the private sector. The lesson from the case, in Healey's opinion, lies in developing adaptive behaviour with regard to the evolving strategy of the national level and in providing a selective, long-standing, vision of the subregion's development within a set of principles that are fully elaborated at the local level.

In the final section, from chapters 6 to 9, the author discusses some crucial theoretical concepts set out at the beginning of the book as interpretive keys for the evidence presented in the case studies. The first reflects on the nature of strategies as they arise (or could arise) in very different social and institutional contexts. The case studies presented in the book reinforce the concept that strategies are 'social constructions' that are formulated within complex governance environments. 'Strategy-making' should not be considered as a linear process, but a cognitive one through which ideas of the future, conceptions of quality of places and environmental well-being, are continuously formulated and reframed.

Secondly, the relational approach to governance and strategy making implies new conceptions of space and environment, of 'city' and 'region', challenging the epistemology of planning/planners and their role within governance processes. The quest for a new relational geography of places, where urban regions are 'spaces of complex layering of multiple social relations, each with their own space-time dynamic and scalar reach' (p. 224) asks planners and politicians to develop their capacity for mobilisation around quality of places and daily life conditions, and for conveying those relevant issues into the policy agenda at the institutional levels in which they act.

Urban Complexity and Spatial Strategies may not be considered a toolkit for giving exhaustive responses to all of the questions it poses, but is a sharp intellectual picture of how challenging and fascinating strategic planning for the governance of places can be in a changing world.

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Ignazio Vinci

Department Città e Territorio, University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy

Email: ignazio.vinci@unipa.it

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Urban space and cityscapes: perspectives from modern and contemporary culture, edited by C. Lindner, London and New York, Routledge, Questioning Cities Series, 2006, 226 pp, £22.99 (Paperback), ISBN 0-415-36653-4

This book offers a range of representations of cityscapes through different analyses of cities presented in images, texts and forms. The chapters are based on discourse analysis, visual treatment and spatial development interpretation. Most authors draw upon French theoretical literature (Baudrillard, Deleuze, Derrida, Guattari, Virilio, Lyotard, De Certeau, Debord and the Situationists) and some architectural theorists (such as Koolhaas

and Lynch). The theoretical and philosophical framework of some papers might seem hazy for those who are not aware of such a postmodern approach and are more interested in urban politics and city-making practices than in literary analysis of cityscapes. Moreover, for the non-English native reader, some presentations, whatever their interests, could sound useless or in vain. Besides this subjective and personal statement, few of the papers catch one's attention.

The book emphasises how urban landmarks are both driving the viewers' gaze upon them and simultaneously changing the gaze's lenses on cityscapes. For instance, skyscrapers are common landmarks of cities and skyline, and for a while were thought of as a symbol of modernity. Skyscrapers also offer another perspective on the city. High-rise building, such as large Ferris wheels are viewpoints from where the gaze upon the city is enlarged and gains height (chapters 2 and 10). Aerial views are both a new way of seeing the city and a mass entertainment experience of cities. The symbolic power of skyscrapers is even reinforced by their disappearance (chapters 3, 4 and 10). Indeed, in several texts, the representation of cityscapes is mainly revealed through the representations of urban disasters or disorders. For instance, Hollywood disaster movies and blockbusters reflect pessimistic representations of cities. Urban paradigms and cities such as Los Angeles or New York are favourite sites for films or novels to describe how disasters occur. Another paper explains how the SARS epidemic in Hong Kong was also an opportunity to reveal and to promote the city, its landmarks (landscape and urban spaces), its heroes and its lifestyle to its inhabitants and to the world through a collusion and common interest between the tourism industry and cinema movie-makers (chapter 5).

In several papers (but also according to many academic and political essays), 9/11 has become a paradigm through which to describe the instability of urban skylines and the fragility of cityscapes. Through the screens, in fiction and in reality, skyscrapers' destruction and urban disasters symbolise both a global 'nervous breakdown' and the end of the world as we used to know it. Indeed, as B. Jarvis notes, hyper-real 9/11 revealed the terrorists' understanding of the *spectacle* through which they used the raw materials of (Westernised) globalisation against globalisation (and Western domination): cities, plane, media, and 'white-collar body' (chapter 4). Throughout the book, the shift toward the postmodern city is outlined while the landmarks of modern cities (like skylines) are no longer relevant as representative of the contemporary cityscape. Postmodern urban landscape could now be symbolised and materialised through other patterns such as exopolis, suburbiascapes or leisure-oriented resorts.

Besides, a postcolonial cityscape is emerging in postcolonial literature, in both migrants and second-generation foreign writers' novels. Their representation of the city is widely related to their urban experience as migrants or as second-generation members of Western societies. Their texts reflect the social and racial divisions of urban practices. Moreover, they emphasise the shift between generations toward a postcolonial, complex and fluid cityscape, where forms of segregation are not simply related to ethnicity (chapters 7 and 8). For instance, South African cityscapes are described in a novel as a more diverse landscape than they used to be. Derelict Central Business Districts and high-rise building are becoming part of the everyday environment in the same way that townships are. HIV and crime issues are part of the common social, political, affective and health backgrounds of any South African story and are even becoming part of the global shape of cities (chapter 8). The recognition and the integration of ethnic minorities in cities could also be a way for cities to retain their dynamism and to symbolise contemporary urban spaces. As it is argued in chapter 6, based on the analysis of a Goystisolo novel, ethnic

fringes nourish urban imaginary, struggling against museification and urban homogeneity, reinventing the psychogeography of cityscapes.

Linking theoretical analysis of urban form and critical perspective on planning practices, Patricia Wise offers an interesting and welcome comment about decontextualised urban policies, especially 'creative narratives' abuses. Described as a developing urban rhizome, the Gold Coast is one of the most dynamic urban areas in Australia, where tourists' experiences are driven not by the search for a specific urban lifestyle but by the taste for a particular kind of leisure and entertainment offered in resort cities. Nevertheless, urban planners and policy-makers wished to reinforce existing 'creative' industries through a clustering policy based on knowledge and economic activities. Based on rhizome theory drawn from Deleuze and Guattari, the author emphasises that creative industries do not flourish where and when planners decide they should. In a 'smooth space', cityscape developments do not follow a predetermined pattern. Thus 'a cultural precinct does not [necessarily] develop around an Arts Centers' (p. 183). Indeed, spaces of lifestyle override and dissolve other spaces, especially planning spaces, such as planned Technology Parks. Creativity and vibrancy exist throughout the Gold Coast, but not where policy-makers expect them. This sounds like a relevant and welcome provocative comment in the current era, where creativity diktat blinds decision-makers and hides major urban issues.

Elsa Vivant,

Institut Français d'Urbanisme, University of Paris, France

Email: else.vivant@univ-paris 8.fr

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