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Book Review: People, Places, and Sustainability; Evaluating Sustainable Development

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Book Reviews

Moser, Gabriel, Enric Pol, Yvonne Bernard, Mirilia Bonnes, José A. Corraliza, and Maria Vittoria Giuliani, eds. 2003. *People, Places, and Sustainability*. Kirkland, WA: Hogrefe & Huber. vii + 339 pp. Paper $44.95. ISBN: 0-88937-263-2.

Ukaga, Okechukwu, and Chris Maser. 2003. *Evaluating Sustainable Development*. Sterling, VA: Stylus. xv + 203 pp. Paper $22.50. ISBN: 1-57922-083-5.
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In the classic book, *A Reader in Planning Theory* (1973), A. Faludi offered a distinction between two theoretical frameworks within the profession of planning. One, which he labeled theory *in* planning, relates to the substantive object of planner's attention, that is, how and why human communities grow and change. He also identified theory *of* planning as encompassing the procedural dimensions of planning, that is, how plans are made. The two books that are reviewed here can be distinguished in terms of these two frameworks.

The Moser et al. collection of twenty-six papers covers a wide range of issues related to the people-environment dimension of sustainability. Drawing from the 16th Conference of the International Association for People-Environment Studies held in Paris in 2000, the stated intent of its editors is to "situate traditional people-environment issues (i.e., housing, neighborhood, urban design) within both an intercultural and a transcultural perspective." Seventeen of the papers are by European authors, four by authors from the United States, and the remaining five by authors from Turkey (two) and the Middle East (three).

The book is divided into four sections. The first section, Urban Change and Sustainability, consists of eight papers that are concerned with how urban environments change over time and how that change affects and relates to the behavior and attitudes of urban residents. The seven papers in the second section, Community, Attachment, and Identity, focus on understanding the physical, psychological, and social characteristics that relate to the personal sense of connection that people develop toward their homes and communities. In the third section, Proximal and Specific Spaces, six papers are concerned with the specific dimensions of environment (buildings and urban spaces) layout and design that can contribute to the sustainability of urban environments. The fourth section, Global Environment Issues and Ecological Behavior, contains five papers that are concerned with the fostering of ecologically favorable behavior in individuals.

While there are some problems of translation, all of the papers in this collection are credible and contributory to the question as stated by the editors. Their methodologies and formats range from case studies (ten papers) and statistical analyses (ten) to literature reviews (three) and essays (three). This mixture helps give a nice balance to the collection, affording the reader an opportunity to gain a sense of both the "bigger picture" (i.e., what is the current state of person-environment studies as an interdisciplinary field?) and specific issues (i.e., can attachments to place be formed in this modern, mobile era?).

Out of the twenty-six papers, there are eleven that I would identify as being most directly and significantly related to planning, specifically, theory *in* planning. In the first section, D. Marchand studies responses to a questionnaire by residents of Rennes and Le Havre to confirm the importance of density and intimacy as design principles for center city redevelopment. H. Ziada provides an interesting essay on the changing character of economic activity, as "informality" gradually and inexorably succumbs to a formalizing process, where family and values are replaced by government, companies, and regulations. Ziada laments this transition and suggests the need for more tolerance of informal activities to help guarantee social justice and, therefore, sustainability. D. Boussa persuasively discusses and describes the relationship between urban heritage and people's sense of place and life satisfaction. As it is lost, the sustainability of cities becomes compromised. In his/her paper, T. Brindley addresses an important issue, namely, the apparent contradiction between the "urban village" model and prevailing and seemingly implacable trends toward increased social segregation and spatial dispersal. Brindley suggests that alternative models can be effective contributors to sustainability without requiring a "renunciation of the contemporary world." And Y. Y. Eid introduces the "urbo-system" model for sustainable cities, which emphasizes the importance of "community capital" as a means by which the links between the community, its economy, and its environment can be strengthened. Eid uses an ancient neighborhood in Cairo as an example of how

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self-perpetuation can be achieved within a seemingly overwhelming context of modernization.

In the second section, H. Turgut and A. I. Cahantimur offer an interesting discussion of the role of the home under a dialectic approach. In their study of Turkish houses, relationships between the individual and the community and private and public spaces are found to be more important than the "mere" conservation of physical appearances. M. Heurlin-Norinder focuses on the satisfaction with public spaces among children in planned neighborhoods. Interviews revealed the importance of mobility combined with a feeling of safety *and* adventure, and it is these characteristics that must be integrated for planning to be effective. Through a review of the literature, S. Drucker shows that while ethnic food consumption and services are an important force of economy and social connection both within ethnic groups (i.e., among its members) and with the outside world (i.e., other ethnic groups and the larger society), little attention has been paid to their space dynamics.

The third section contains three papers that are, in my view, most directly related to planning and its theoretical framework. P. Kellett and W. Bishop present an essay on the history and dynamics of home-based enterprises (HBEs) and a case study of a city in Bali to make the case of the potential of HBEs to contribute "to vital, lively environments, and more sustainable communities." The study of traffic-calming installations by V. Rozec reveals sound to have far-reaching effects on perceptions of quality of life, extending into such dimensions as security and cleanliness. And in the third paper in this section, F. Bordas-Astudillo et al. study the relationship between density and the feeling of being crowded or cramped. They confirm the importance of social relations as a mitigating factor, as well as the tendency for people to carry over their feelings from one environment to another.

Beyond these eleven, there are five others that have some degree of relevance to planning. For example, the Multi-Modal Strategy (MMS) presented by O. Romice as a methodology to codify and use people's evaluative image of their community is interesting and potentially valuable. Similarly, the statistical study presented by A. Matheau-Police that reveals the importance of "situational variables" to the taking of individual acts of conservation could be used as a reference in planning decisions regarding the capital components of a community's recycling program. The insights into human behavior revealed by W. Poortinga et al.'s study with respect to environmental strategies, solutions, and actions could be of value to planners during the process and participatory phase of planning. The same is true of A. Craig's analysis of values versus attitudes and R. Garcia-Mira et al.'s comparison of the strength of altruistic (i.e., community) versus egoistic (i.e., individual) values.

That leaves ten papers whose contribution to planning is marginal at best. Some of these suffer from methodologies that are either obscure or not persuasive, others study phenomena that are not particularly relevant to planning, while still others offer insights that are not particularly useful to planners. For example, the description of methodology by A. M. Nenci et al. to measure "architectural legibility" is obscure and, therefore, difficult to both apprehend and replicate. The postoccupancy evaluation (POE) methodology discussed by H. S. Gabr and K. Al-Salla as a means to redesign interior spaces, while potentially important with respect to sustainability, is unlikely to be of usefulness in the practice of planning, which is similarly the case for the "space syntax analysis" methodology described by O. Gur and A. Bekleyen. A. Legendre's study of day care centers and T. Robiero's analysis of occupational accidents, while interesting in their own right, are not likely to fall under the action or evaluative domain of many planning efforts. And E. S. Brierly's treatise on the "narrative interpretation of memory" covers conceptual territory that is probably not familiar to most planners and likely of limited value, which is also likely the case for G. Francescato's discussion of the reasons for the "failure" of person-environment studies.

Still, in this postmodern age, with its increasing interest in and commitment to the multidimensional framework of sustainability, it is important for planners to become exposed to, and at least somewhat versed in, the widest possible range of disciplines and fields. The question is whether this widening sphere should encompass discussions of (for example) the reasons for the failures of man-environment studies as an interdisciplinary field or the "narrative interpretation of nature." None of the papers in this collection provide information that is in my view pivotally or crucially important. Rather, they should be viewed as possibly useful contributions. Constraints on time and energy require most of us to use professional relevance as a criterion on which to choose where our attention can/should be focused. Speaking from that perspective, it is my opinion that this book—while a significant collection of quality works about a range of issues—deserves the *selective* attention of planners.

In contrast to the largely substantive contribution of the eleven key papers identified in the Moser et al. collection, the book by Okechukkwu Ukaga and Chris Maser is purely concerned with the procedural dimension of planning and community development. Their purpose is not to offer a means to evaluate the quality of

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sustainable development strategies but rather to propose a method for communities through which effective sustainable development strategies can be created. Recognizing that "sustainable development can differ significantly from one place or group to another," they are concerned with presenting "a basic philosophy for participatory evaluation of sustainable development."

The first five chapters lay the foundation for the final chapter. Chapter 1 is essentially devoted to explaining the need for this book, that is, why sustainable development requires an effective participatory process. In chapter 2, the authors focus on how goals and objectives are generated, requiring the asking of the appropriate questions and the selection of "good" indicators. Chapter 3 describes how data can be collected, with a brief paragraph covering a variety of "options," such as brainstorming, focus groups, surveys, workshops, and so on. Ten criteria for the selection of the appropriate data collection option(s) are presented. In chapter 4, the authors discuss how qualitative and quantitative data should be analyzed and interpreted, involving a search for patterns in the case of the former and using descriptive and inferential statistics in the case of the latter. A case study is also included to show how citizens can participate in this aspect of the process. Chapter 5 presents a framework through which the quality of communications, both during and after the process, can be evaluated. In the final chapter, a fourteen-step guide is offered for the actual design and implementation of an evaluation plan.

To a considerable extent, Ukaga and Maser have recast the standard planning process under the label of *sustainable development*. There is little in this book that will be news to planners. And it (like any book) has its weaknesses. For example, in chapter 2, the authors use the word *variable* without defining it. The descriptions of the "options" for collecting data are too short to be useful. Similarly, the descriptions of statistical methods in chapter 4 are woefully inadequate, a weakness that is punctuated by the lack of suggested sources of additional information. And this suggests author uncertainty as to who their audience is: on one hand, planners already (presumably) know how to use statistics and so are not in need of these brief descriptions; on the other hand, laypersons need much more than that which is provided.

Still, this is the first book to specifically attempt to define a planning process that is based on sustainability, and the authors have done a credible job. The book is sprinkled with useful tidbits (such as the need for objectives to be *smart* and the six characteristics of an "effective question"). The case studies for the most part succeed as illustrations of how the various presented concepts and ideas translate in the real world. And some of their remarks and comments are positively poetic (e.g., "amid the flotsam and jetsam of change in which the decay of the dying era seems, at least momentarily, to overwhelm the formative one"). So, while I wouldn't recommend the book as required reading, I do feel that any planner would find it worth a look.

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Faludi, Andreas, ed. 1973. *A reader in planning theory*. Oxford, UK: Pergamon.

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Hank Dittmar, and Gloria Ohland, eds. 2003. *The New Transit Town: Best Practices in Transit-Oriented Development*. Washington, DC: Island Press. 264 pp. $55 and $32. Hardcover and Paperback. ISBN: 1-55963-116-3 and 1-55963-117-1.
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The concept of transit-oriented development (TOD) has been an active part of planning discussions for more than a dozen years now. Most existing research reports, articles, or books to date, however, are only able to offer projections based on theory or assertion. The novelty of such planning initiatives precludes a full account of completed and mature projects. This has led to an active literature heavy on the forecasting or anticipation side but extremely light on the outcome side. The *New Transit Town* (edited by Dittmar and Ohland) offers readers an account contrary to this trend; it details matters of TOD planning that have come to fruition. By doing so, it offers a refreshing, up-to-date, and remarkably informative account of the TOD concept.

The twelve chapters of the edited book are divided into two sections. The first half provides chapters that update the reader on the TOD concept and address different dimensions of TODs. These dimensions focus on describing the actors, regulations, financing, and traffic/parking issues. The second half of the book chronicles five different completed TODs from different parts of the country, including the Washington, D.C., area, Dallas, Atlanta, San Jose, and San Diego. The intent is to depict the first generation of TOD projects and derive lessons for the next generation. The book claims to take a middle-path approach through TOD debates, examining the limitations of TOD and setting guidelines for new projects.

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