



Urban and regional planning and development – 20th century forms and 21st century transformations

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BOOK REVIEW

Urban and regional planning and development – 20th century forms and 21st century transformations, edited by Rajiv R. Thakur, Ashok K. Dutt, Sudhir K. Thakur and George M. Pomeroy, Springer, Cham, 2020. xiv + 546 pp., US\$199.99 (hbk), ISBN 978-3-030-31775-1, US\$149.00 (ebk), ISBN 978-3-030-31776-8. <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783030317751>

I was initially motivated to review this edited volume by a curiosity to understand better the current trends, methods and theoretical cross-fertilisation within urban and regional planning. The possibility of comparing this book's remarks on urban forms and spatial transformations with those of prime classics in planning and regional studies was also exciting. Have we become any wiser in the way we plan, engineer and govern our cities and regions? What are the key differences between planning agendas influenced by the post-Second World War recovery period, and the present day marked by private-led development, city networks, smart and circular urban development, city-regional imaginaries and grand societal challenges? The book provides some answers to these questions. It also fuels ongoing conversations on how to deal with important planning and development issues, from Europe and Asia to Africa and Latin America.

This book's storyline is simple, yet novel: to celebrate Dr Frank James Costa's five decades of remarkable urban and regional planning scholarship. This is accomplished by bringing together about 60 scholars from around the world to share their experiences in addressing socio-spatial and spatial-economic issues. The work of Costa connects intrinsically to the roots of urban and regional planning practice and education in the United States, as the editors' debate in chapter 2. Leo Jacobson, Costa's doctoral advisor, was the lead behind several experimental learning processes in which students took a major responsibility in steering their own education trajectory. Costa was concerned, among other subjects, with the role of values in public policy and their adaptive capacity to existing environments and demands. He was also a pivotal actor in designing the planning programmes at the University of Akron, Ohio. It is not my intention here to provide a summary of the book's 34 chapters, which are divided into seven parts. I will engage, however, with debates that were timely yet seldom explored in the literature. The chapters can be read independently, although there are many conceptual relations between them, including a shift from state-led planning to market-driven land development; and how urban governance has been changing not only in the regions of the Global North but also in newly emerging regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The first part of the book serves as a prelude and comprises theoretical overviews of urban and regional planning and development. The case study research presented is particularly appealing. While providing an account of the evolution of urban and regional planning in the United States, chapter 3 engages with multiple planning theories, from Ebenezer Howard and the garden city movement to Alfred Weber

and the theory of industrial location. Both remain prime references in urban geography and regional studies. The authors then contrast these seminal theories with the work of Patrick Geddes and the idea of urban growth as evolution, and the studies of Ernest Burgess and the concentric zone model, associated with Chicago's urbanized landscape.

As a reader, I welcome such comprehensive theoretical background. The editors bring up important debates on flagship planning and regional development theories against a timeframe that allows us to explore the case studies that follow from a clear spatial and temporal stance. I was impressed by examples of the innovative governance approaches undertaken to improve planning and support development in southern contexts, from regional planning in Costa Rica (chapter 8) to participatory planning in Thailand (chapter 19) and tackling regional inequalities in India (chapter 26). Chapter 4 also focuses on the transition of China's regional development patterns from a 'belt' to a 'block' urban form approach. This means that regional plans started promoting a national strategy intended to develop cities as clusters (or blocks) instead of regional-based development belts. This shift has affected China's urbanization since the opening up in 1978 to the present day. This chapter on the planning system in China contrasts with the challenges of informality associated with Botswana's urban landscape. In chapter 7, planners and geographers can learn from the efforts of Botswana's public authorities in preparing spatial plans. The main planning and spatial policy challenges in this southern African country resonate with other urban realities in Africa, in particular a lack of resources to implement plans. To resolve this, the authors call for a better articulation between plan-making, local realities and policy instruments that could streamline plan implementation. From chapter 11, I learned that social media footprints, as those generated via Twitter, provide a unique opportunity to study the social and temporal characteristics of how people use these platforms and thus support planners to model urban mobility patterns or support land management. In addition, the authors underline the usefulness of social media footprints in epidemiological models, which are important tools for guiding pandemic-mitigation interventions.

I also found chapter 15 insightful for practitioners involved in planning public spaces. This chapter contributes to the increasing debate on geographies of women's safety, fear of crime and harassment by focusing on everyday challenges of women in India. It provides a much-needed fresh take on the relationships between urbanization and neoliberal economic transformation with a focus on women's mobility and the battle for gender justice and the right to the city.

Planning methods enter the spotlight in the third part of the book. Chapters bring examples from Ecuador's spatial inequality assessments (chapter 9), along with an analysis of urban crime rates in Houston, Texas (chapter 10). In chapter 17, the relationship between public and private space is discussed in light of the prevailing commodification of the public realm in cities. The case study is Tres Cantos, a Spanish town planned during the Spanish dictatorship but implemented in the early years of democracy. The chapter features a fascinating diagram on how planners envisioned Tres Cantos as a self-

governed city or cooperative model of society and consumption, which could become useful in conceptual comparisons with circular urban metabolism.

Urban inequality, social segregation and urban governance under neoliberalism are a key theme of the fourth and fifth parts of the book. For example, chapter 23 evidences that most of the urban plans in Bogotá, Colombia, have heightened socio-spatial segregation due to zoning policies that respond to the interests of real estate developers. Chapter 25 raises questions about the values of planning professionals and their entanglement in urban planning in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The authors claim that planners struggle to give voice to the most vulnerable groups due to the top-down, highly bureaucratic ladder of planning decision-making.

The book ends with a section devoted to planning sustainable urban futures in the seventh part. Cases bring together important insights into how to drive inclusive, social, ecological and economic sustainable development in cities in the Global South (chapter 31).

Alongside these strengths, the book has two drawbacks. First, more forward-looking concluding remarks in each chapter would have been helpful to position the discussions against current debates, not only in the planning field but also in regional studies and economic geography. Engagement with

current debates on degrowth, slow innovation or the role of rural hinterlands in sustainable development would have been fruitful. The editors and authors could have been more ambitious. In other words, they could have envisioned beyond the engrained socio-spatial conditions and imagine how cities and regions in these planning-practice-rich geographies might be otherwise. Second, the prohibitive price of the book, in particular for early-career researchers and those based in low-income economies. This issue often goes beyond the realm of editors' decisions to the current academic publishing system. In spite of these weaknesses, this book has profound implications for the planning and governance of cities and regions across the world.

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