

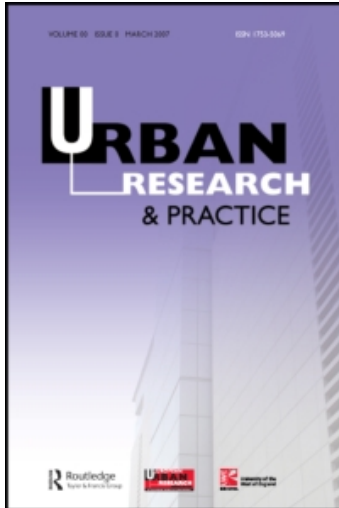
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Book reviews

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Book reviews

Regional development and spatial planning in an enlarged European Union, edited by Neil Adams, Jeremy Alden and Neil Harris, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006, 283 pp., £60 (hardback), ISBN 978 0 7546 4714 0

Major worldwide processes such as globalization and the collapse of the Soviet Union have generated changes in contexts, circumstances and institutional structures in many countries beyond recognition. At the same time, the enlargement of the European Union has brought significant new challenges for both the established and new member states, as well as for the EU itself. The extent of the new challenges is evident if one considers that, at the point of accession, over 90% of the population of the new member states lived in regions where the GDP per capita was less than 75% the EU average. In this sense, the process of enlargement has clearly triggered considerable transformations of the socio-economic map of the now EU-27. Meanwhile, for the former socialist states that joined the EU, the collapse of the Soviet Union required the construction of an entirely new institutional, economic and political system, which had never before been undertaken on such a scale.

Interestingly, the above-mentioned processes contributed to dramatically increase the importance of spatial planning and the territorial aspects of regional policy at the EU level. This appears to have been brought about by an increasing realization of the importance of managing the spatial consequences of sectoral spending programmes and, despite an increasing emphasis on competitiveness at the expense of cohesion since the adoption of the Lisbon Agenda, the territorial aspects of regional policy are set to remain central to EU policies and programmes at least until the end of the current programming period in 2013. The publication and content of recent documents such as the Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion, the Territorial States and Perspectives of the European Union and the Territorial Agenda, all published in 2007, confirm this tendency, whilst at the same time highlighting the increasing complexity and tensions between different policy objectives.

As far as the different member states are concerned, experiences across the various regions within Europe suggest a rapid changing context for undertaking regional development and planning activities, as institutions, organizations and individuals have to continuously adapt to the influence of global capital and the ease of sharing so-called good practices, providing fertile ground for increasingly homogeneous environments and policy approaches. In this concern, the volume *Regional Development and Spatial Planning in an Enlarged European Union*, building on the results of an international project funded under the INTERREG IIIC framework, provides an in-depth and reflective account of how spatial planning and regional development activities are evolving in some of Europe's smaller peripheral countries.

The editors seek to examine some of the approaches taken in relation to spatial planning with a specific focus on two geographical peripheral areas of the EU: Ireland, Wales and Scotland in the west and the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the east.

To do so, the volume is structured in five parts. The first part aims to clarify the terms 'regional development' and 'spatial planning', providing the basis for analysing the different case studies presented in detail in the rest of the book. Section 2 then focuses on the evolving European context for regional development and spatial planning, highlighting the key developments that have occurred in recent years and are likely to happen in the near future, also as an answer to EU enlargement. Part 3 provides a collection of case studies presenting development and planning experiences, as they are declined in the three Celtic countries of northwest Europe. The section brings together academics and policy-makers, who have been responsible for – or closely involved in – the preparation of spatial strategies in their countries over the past five years, therefore complementing an increasing literature focused on reviewing the progress and innovative experiences in spatial planning activity in EU's northwest periphery. Part 4 is perhaps the most interesting section of the volume, as it analyses case studies of regional development and spatial planning in the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, again developed through the joint efforts of practitioners and academics and therefore providing a detailed insight into how the particular regional challenges are being addressed. These chapters constitute a particularly valuable addition to the literature on spatial planning in Europe, a yet unexplored field that will require further development in the future if increasing integration between the western and the eastern parts of the continent has to be achieved.

The final section draws together key lessons and common themes arising from the individual case studies. It provides the opportunity to look across various contextual experiences of regional development and spatial planning, allowing for an overview of the different approaches and shedding some light on commonalities and differences. The editors assess the extent to which the various contexts appear to be converging in process and approach, content and principles of spatial strategies. The review enables some conclusions to be made and further questions to be asked on whether spatial planning can genuinely promote integrated policy delivery and be a truly effective instrument for dealing with wicked issues.

Whereas over the past decade, there have been a number of important theoretical developments in our understanding of the significance of subnational territories within a European framework characterized at the same time by growing integration and diversity, *Regional Development and Spatial Planning in an Enlarged European Union* presents itself as an up-to-date collection of essays that begins to chart the development of the different forms of spatial development strategies across the continent. It is not the intention of the editors to provide a comprehensive analysis of spatial planning and regional development. What the book does is to provide an insight into the various approaches taken in selected small countries, as well as a basis for further research in the field. Bridging together both conceptual and evidence-based analysis, the book delivers a well-grounded critical discussion about the potential and factual contribution of spatial planning to balanced regional development in different European contexts. In so doing, it allows for illuminating insight of the multifaceted process of 'Europeanization' of spatial planning, and makes a timely and very useful reading for analysts and commentators of European studies, planning, economic development and, more generally, for all those concerned with spatial planning and regional development.

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The spaces of the modern city, edited by G. Prakash and K.M. Kruse, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008, 472 pp., £19.95 (paperback), ISBN 139780691133430

The specific, although heterogeneous, branches of knowledge that can be classified under the label 'urban studies' have always been at the very centre of the sciences of geography and sociology, as well as history and, of course, planning studies. The history of this branch of thought has been hence always characterized by many contributions but also, apart from some significant exceptions, by little collaboration across different disciplinary boundaries. Nowadays, it is possible to identify two important movements in this field. From one side – and only from certain academics – there has been a movement toward the reconsideration of a central question that could be probably never fully answered: what is a city? And, moreover: what is the relevance of space within, through, and outside the city? Turning to the other side, we can clearly recognize – particularly among geographers, sociologists and historians – the rise of a particular sensibility aimed at productive synthesizing and fruitful interchange of various specific knowledge concerning the same theme: the city. In other words, it is possible to identify the rise of 'urban studies' as a distinct kind of (common) field.

The compelling work edited by Prakash and Kruse captures precisely these two movements. Firstly, because the book's approach to the concept of 'city' is undoubtedly at the frontier of current urban studies. To give an example, it is worth quoting from the introduction one of the basic principles of this work: 'the idea of the city as an organism, defined by an internally coherent civic life and structured by clear relationship to the region, nation and wider world, appears obsolete' (1). Secondly, in the book not only are there scholars from different backgrounds (although most are historians), but its theoretical foundations are spread widely across different disciplines – resulting in the book benefiting from a considerable wealth of insights to interest all kinds of reader.

The book is divided into three main parts, containing four essays each.

The first, 'Global Spatial Imaginaries', aims to examine one of the most challenging questions of the contemporary urban issue: the history of the engagement of the city at the global level. The gist of this part of the book is perfectly expressed by Ethington (one of the authors of this section, with a work on Los Angeles' global spaces in the 1920s and 1930s), when he states: 'the history of a global metropolis legitimately includes the local histories of the global places that become part of that metropolis' global hinterland' (59). Other interesting essays include one by Frisby, on the production of urban space generated by city planners and architects in Vienna and Berlin at the end of the nineteenth century, as well as the 'kaleidoscopic' Johannesburg described by Murray. Special comment should be reserved for Crane's work on the spatial intersection of the architectures of Algiers and Marseille – surely one of the finest pieces of the entire book, with a high awareness of the complexity of space.

The second part of the book, 'Spatial Politics', investigates the urban space as a projection of politics or, in other words, as a realm of political practices. Although this viewpoint is by no means original, the case studies presented in the four papers of this section are of interest. Jiménez's work on the 'popular' politics in the public spaces of Mexico between 1880 and 1920 is, for instance, a captivating example of how we might consider describing and, to a certain extent, comprehending the ground-scale political dynamics that concretely build our cities. Another fascinating and memorable essay in this section of the book is Schrank's, concerning the well-known history of Los Angeles' Watts Towers. Despite the familiarity of the story itself, Schrank draws out some pivotal socio-spatial

aspects of it, describing with clarity how the building symbolically identified a community, and the territorial relevancies of this process.

The third and last part of the book is 'Spaces of Everyday Life', which aims to describe the city not only as a set of historical forces but more particularly as a space of innovation and change. This section, potentially the most interesting part of the book, unfortunately – in my modest opinion – is not. That's mainly because of the lack of a precise definition of what exactly these authors mean by 'everyday life' in the city – an open question ever since research began in this field. Therefore, although some of the essays are essential reading – such as Sand's, on the 'Street Observation Society' that emerged in Tokyo during the economic bubble of 1986–1990 – this last section of the book seems to me to be the weakest of the whole project.

In conclusion, this book, carrying the reader through a fascinating tour through very high-profile essays, certainly offers useful insights to geographers, sociologists and everyone else interested in understanding the contemporary city. One final point for the editors: although we are talking about a collection of essays, *The Spaces of the Modern City* is a book in the best sense of the word – coherent and fluid – thanks to the shared theoretical background and the high standard of its contributions.

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Searching for the Just City: debates in urban theory and practice ('Questioning Cities' series), edited by P. Marcuse, J. Connory, J. Novy, I. Olivo, C. Potter and J. Steil, New York, Routledge, 2009, 264 pp, £80.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-77613-4

The debate on Justice and the city is as old as the discipline of urban studies itself. Issues associated with justice have attracted the attention of both academics and practitioners. In the book under review, scholars with a high reputation in the field of urban studies as well as justice theory have combined with PhD students to produce a very well-written book full of simulating ideas.

Searching for the Just City is really about searching. It does not propose any model of the ideal city that could be used as a blueprint. On the contrary, as David Harvey (with Cuz Potter) argues in one of the introductory theoretical chapters, the Just City will result from a struggle for redefinition of human rights. The book attempts to connect recent development in justice debates with everyday issues of urban change, urban planning and the struggles of various groups for redistribution or recognition.

The book is divided into three parts. The first, 'Why Justice? Theoretical Foundations of the Just City Debate', introduces some recent thinking on justice theory and focuses on their implication for urban researchers. I found this section particularly important, since much of what constitutes 'justice studies' has, until recently, failed to reflect on issues such as redistribution and the recognition debate in social justice theory. Frank Fisher, among other contributors, connects the discursive planning approach with the just planning debate.

The second part focuses more on the importance of particular processes or issues for Just City debate and practice. The discussion focuses on concrete cases that are in themselves worthy of study. In particular, the contribution 'Urban Justice and Recognition:

Affirmation and Hostility in Beer Sheva' by Oren Yiftachel, Ravit Goldhaber and Roy Nuriel explores social injustice based on (un)recognition in the processes of urban planning in an Israeli city. They focus on three groups that were and still are treated differently. One of these groups is supported to integrate itself in the society through affirmative strategies; one is simply just ignored and marginalized; and the last one is oppressed and excluded from its right to the city. James DeFilippis focuses on economic justice in the case of New York. He argues that newly created economic injustice (created by lowering wages in some professions) cannot be justified by competition between cities in the globalizing economy. These occupations experience decreasing wages and unprotected labour conditions and are generally not related to core businesses that compete globally. Employers in local services (who do not contribute to urban competitiveness) are mostly affected by these new injustices.

The third part investigates these processes in greater depth by focusing on particular cases of the struggle for justice in various urban contexts ('How Do We Realize Just Cities? From Debate to Action'). Detailed studies of local struggles for environmental justice in brownfields redevelopment, or the injustices before and after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, show various strategies in their different contexts. In the Postscript, Peter Marcuse reflects on the development of the Just City and Right to the City debate. He focuses on new historical situations in pointing out that some questions from the past remain important, along with new challenges.

After reading this book, I came away with a comprehensive set of stimulating ideas about abstract theories of justice as well as a better understanding of 'middle range' theory from the second part, which fills in the gap between abstract theory and everyday struggles – eventually introduced in the third part. I strongly recommend this book.

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