Environment and Planning A 2007, volume 39, pages 2794 – 2798

doi:10.1068/a3911rvw

Reviews

The code of the city: standards and the hidden language of place making by E Ben-Joseph; MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2005, 241 pages, $60.00 cloth, $24.00 paper (£39.95, £15.95) ISBN 0 262 02588 4, 0 262 52445 7

Eran Ben-Joseph lays his cards on the table early on in this book, leaving the reader under no illusions about his views on the ways standards and codes shape urban environments. In the preface he recalls how, in the late 1980s, he and his partner were approached to plan and site a residential development on the outskirts of Tel Aviv. It was during this process that he realised "standards and codes are what drive design outcomes" (page vii). Despite claiming that the purpose of the book is not to champion the abolition of regulations, Ben-Joseph at times slips into a characterisation of standards as overly restrictive of development that is all too familiar in the literature. There is a lack of discussion of the terminology central to the book, such as 'regulation', 'rule', 'norm', and 'code', despite the contested nature of these terms. It is also surprising given the substantial literature incorporating discussions of concepts such as regulation and the rule, including work by Foucault and Lefebvre. By incorporating this wider body of literature he would have added theoretical punch to the book.

In part 1 of the book Ben-Joseph provides a historical overview of the development of urban standards. This section draws on some fascinating examples of early standards, and, along with an eclectic selection of illustrations and photographs, it provides the reader with an intriguing insight into the ways that regulation and coding have helped to shape urban settlements. For example, under the rule of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I (483 – 565 AD) rules were in place preventing new construction from obscuring direct views of the water. Ben-Joseph also incorporates a valuable discussion of the role that social norms play in establishing what are often perceived to be 'rational' and 'scientific' standards, such as those guiding street width. However, as he demonstrates in the case of early-20th-century America, these regulations were based upon judgments about how to relieve 'social ills' and what constituted economically and socially 'superior' environments. Ben-Joseph suggests that an awareness of place-based norms is of critical importance in creating successful and prosperous communities. This forms, arguably, one of the most powerful ideas within the book, and is later developed as he calls for a movement towards more flexible, place-specific, forms of coding and regulation.

Part 2 of the book suggests that localities are often fixed into a rigid set of nationally prevalent procedures with regards to the regulation of urban place making. In drawing on particular case studies, Ben-Joseph looks at the ways that long-established standards, such as sewerage systems, shape towns and cities. This section also seeks to paint a picture of common attitudes and perceptions towards the regulation of developments. However, the majority of data relate to the opinions of developers who are generally critical of regulations, with only limited attention given to the views of public officials such as town planners. No mention is made of the attitudes of other design professionals, such as architects, who may well hold different views. Despite this, Ben-Joseph calls for planners, architects, and engineers to work together to challenge ineffective regulatory frameworks. He echoes his earlier call for regulations to be sensitised to local factors and norms, by calling for these professions to establish place-based criteria responsive to local contexts.

Part 3 examines the ways that the regulation of the built environment has already begun to diverge from standard models of control. For example, Ben-Joseph highlights the rise of common interest communities (CICs) in the United States. These private developments rely on a series of restrictions and covenants to control land use, design decisions, services, and social conduct. According to Ben-Joseph, CICs provide developers with greater design choice, have more efficient layouts, and avoid the lengthy approval process that is typical of the mainstream regulatory apparatus. They are also attractive to local governments, he suggests, since they

are exempt from legal or maintenance responsibilities. Ben-Joseph acknowledges that these developments can be unpalatable for those concerned about issues of social segregation and economic elitism in relation to privatised spaces. However, despite drawing on data that show, for example, that CIC residents are diverse in terms of economic affluence and race, concerns about the growth of privatised spaces are not, I feel, adequately addressed.

Since standards and regulations play a role in shaping design outcomes, Ben-Joseph's suggestion that they "drive design outcomes" serves to downplay a raft of other contributing factors, such as budgetary restrictions, client specifications, and the role of the architect, all of which receive limited attention in the book. For example, one could conceive of the design team—made up of a number of different professionals, each with their own knowledge and expertise—as a regulating influence upon design. In this sense, *The Code of the City* fails to engage fully with the subtleties of the issues and processes surrounding the regulation of the built environment. By incorporating greater discussion of factors, such as the role of designers and the way their approach to design shapes developments, Ben-Joseph would have produced a more balanced assessment of the contribution regulations make to the design of cities and towns.

Despite, this, the book is a welcome addition to the limited amount of literature surrounding the use of codes and standards in the built environment. It provides the reader with a valuable historical context relating to the development of regulatory standards, as well as highlighting a range of contemporary case studies where regulations and coding have played a part in the shaping of urban developments. In this sense the book is a first in its field and should therefore be of considerable interest to urban design professionals such as planners and architects, as well as building code officials, students, and academics. Its publication is particularly timely in light of a recent resurgence of interest by government and nongovernmental organisations in the potential that coding and regulation can offer in helping to contribute to a design-led renaissance of cities (see, for example, DETR and CABE, 2000).

Emma Street
Department of Geography, King's College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS, England

Reference

DETR, CABE, 2000 *By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice* (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, London)

Nature and national identity after communism: globalizing the ethnoscape by K Z S Schwartz; University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA, 2006, 288 pages, $60.00 cloth, $27.95 paper, ISBN 0 8229 4296 8, 0 8229 5942 9

In her book on Latvian conjunctions of nature and nation, Katrina Schwartz explains how generations of Latvians have understood their particular relationship to nature, which has come to embody what it means to be Latvian. She also analyses the local responses to Western programmes of nature conservation during the era of postcommunism. Homelands are, according to Schwartz, constructed by infusing physical terrain with national meaning, transforming landscape into 'ethnoscape'. Historic sites are correspondingly naturalised and natural features historicised, a process which turns the surrounding nature into habitats and ancestral homelands.

Schwartz's approach is linked to two parallel debates on nature and nations. First, as part of the studies of nations and nationalism, she examines the social construction of nature as a means of, and forum for, developing national identity. Second, informed by the traditions of political ecology, she analyses the influence of particular Latvian discourses of environment and homeland on international ecological concerns.

Schwartz's view is grounded in constructivist thinking, but at the same time she underlines the continuity of the ways of seeing nationhood. For her it is not something endlessly fabricated anew. The inherited ways of talking about the nation and the homeland delimit, as she states, the conceptual universe within which Latvians typically think about themselves and their land. The history of Latvian nationhood is a history of competition over nationhood: it is a struggle for control over the imagination about community.

Nature and National Identity after Communism offers readers two competing tropes of Latvian identity. First, an agrarian inward-looking identity stems from the early German *Heimat* traditions of homeland studies, which heavily influenced the politics of the first republic—that is, the nation of farmers—during the interwar years. Second, an international and liberal identity is grounded in Latvia's past as a seafaring culture, looking across the Baltic Sea from the cosmopolitan capital of Riga, but it also utilises the metaphor of a bridge, or crossroads, seeing Latvia as a multiethnic link between the westernmost and the easternmost Europe.

Schwartz develops her argument by concentrating on the national discourses run by intellectuals, politicians, and other key individuals of Latvia's past and present. She starts with the national awakening of the 1850s and continues with the radical reforms of the peasant state of the 1920s and 1930s. Thereafter she concentrates on collectivisation under Soviet rule (1940–91) and finally ends with the post-Soviet years of orientation toward the West. The historical part is then followed by a few case studies on rural-environmental issues, focusing on nature conservation along the Baltic Sea coast and the forest sector.

The historical development of nature conservation on the Baltic Sea coast is identified as part of broader international trends in environmentalism. Schwartz presents the difficulties, but also successes, in forwarding Western ideas of national parks and protecting homeland traditions during the years of Soviet rule. Latvia joined the World Trade Organization in 1998, NATO in 2002, and the European Union in 2004, and this rapid Western integration also intensified the environmental codevelopment, both intergovernmental and nongovernmental. The agrarian producers in Latvia could not compete with imported foods offered by the opening markets, and this failure disappointed rural strategists hoping to reconstruct the rural backbone of the country. In addition, the EU subsidies for farmers to protect the environmental and cultural values, instead of producing food, emerged as a matter of broad confusion. The turn from exporting butter and bacon to exporting wilderness and biodiversity was received with ambivalence, and it also brought along confrontations between green developers, traditionalists, and industrial actors.

A similar tension took shape in forest politics, where the initially German-influenced tradition of efficient forestry, later modified by the industrial Soviet model, met troubles with the new pressures to protect and generate nonmarket forest products and intangible values. Considering, for example, wetland forests valuable as such, instead of seeing them as the targets of a draining programme, became a matter of dispute not only between the various schools of internationalisation, but also between generations. Many homeland defenders found it difficult to learn to value their own heritage as a green development asset.

Schwartz's book is well balanced with theoretical and empirical elements. It also succeeds in running a discussion through substantial matters, including matters that are important from the local points of view. She bravely raises the question of folk traditions and continuity, which is rare today in the constructivist branches of political and socioenvironmental studies. The concentric side of sociospatial development is respected (see also Jürgenson, 2004) and not annihilated by the currently popular visions of global relational codependence.

Only a few critical questions need to be highlighted here. The forest question is for some reason left to the margins of the book, only emerging as an issue in one chapter at the end of the book. This is surprising when one thinks about the leading role of forest industry in Latvia, covering 20–35% of export value during the 1990s. Forest production was also regarded, as one of Schwartz's informants puts it, as "the most Latvian" sector of the economy during the Soviet years. Her neglect of the forest question also becomes striking in the historical chapters that superficially pass the German and Russian models of forestry. Especially the Soviet system of forest use, which was based on three categories of protection and use, is left without proper reflection.

The eastern connection is thus undeveloped in *Nature and National Identity after Communism* and so is the northern connection. When opening the debate on the national awakening in Latvia, Schwartz discusses the early Baltic peoples as a branch of Indo-Europeans, but forgets that many of the small groups of peoples north of Latvia, including, for example, the Estonians and also the Livonians in one of her study areas, belong to a non-Indo-European group, that of Finno-Ugric speaking peoples. The mistake is corrected later in her case study on northern

Kurzeme National Park but, in general, the northern dimension is left strikingly unexamined in Schwartz's book. This, of course, only mirrors the main lines of internationalisation Latvia has been broadly connected to before and during the period of national awakening, and especially in the post-Soviet years. The Western emphasis perhaps also reflects Schwartz's current position as assistant professor of political science at the University of Florida. The personal Latvian – American link explains much of the rich content and fluent English with which the book is written. The book really deserves a broad audience among all those interested in detailed historical and political analyses of ethnic and environmental issues in concrete local – global settings.

Ari Aukusti Lehtinen
Department of Geography, University of Joensuu, PO Box 111, 80101 Joensuu, Finland

Reference

Jürgenson A, 2004, "On the formation of the Estonians' concepts of homeland and home place" *Pro Ethnologia* **18** 97 – 114

Engaging the future: forecasts, scenarios, plans, and projects edited by L D Hopkins, M A Zapata; Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Cambridge, MA, 2007, 392 pages, $35.00 paper, ISBN 978 1 55844 170 5

The future is inherently uncertain. In accepting this we should not be fatalistic suggest the authors of *Engaging the Future*. Rather, as the title of the book suggests, scholars, planners, public officials, and citizens alike should endeavour to engage the future, creating and shaping it via a continuing process of regional and urban planning. The tools available for us to advance this process are forecasts, scenarios, plans, and projects.

The opening chapter by the editors Lewis and Zapata sets the tone for the volume, highlighting that these tools are ways of representing, manipulating, and assessing ideas about the future. They allow us not simply to think about the future but also to influence it. Predictions, however, are conspicuous by their absence from Lewis and Zapata's putative toolbox. This, as Moore discusses in chapter 2, is because of an all too frequent overreliance on quantitative output from models. Moore complains that the emphasis on using numerical predictions about populations, transport demands, and other regional trends can inhibit creativity, stifle debate, and limit policy alternatives, when predicted futures are regarded as inevitable ones. Thus, numerical predictions can suppress uncertainty rather than engaging and dealing with it effectively.

The alternative approach, developed and explored throughout the remaining chapters, is one that is increasingly reflexive, collaborative, democratic, and consensual. Both the tools that will facilitate this approach and their use in (predominantly American) case studies are presented and discussed. In chapter 3 Grant discusses the use of visioning to improve participation in the planning process, highlighting both the advantages (democratic inclusion) and drawbacks (potential munipulation) of such an approach. Myers (chapter 4) introduces the idea of narratives to examine how individual choices will influence future communities, and stresses that, if quantitative data about the future are to be used, they must be embedded within a story that describes community transformations through time. Narratives are also discussed as tools by which to engage and generate 'reflective conversations' between diverse parts of the public (Cummings, chapter 12) and to highlight multiple views and expectations about the future rather than suppressing them (Zapata, chapter 13).

Chapters 5 (Smith), 6 (Avin), 7 (Harwood), and 11 (Deal and Pallathucheril) all focus on the use of scenarios in planning in business, industrial, regional, and local community contexts. In these contexts, scenarios differ from forecasts as they do not assign any probability or likelihood estimates to their feasibility, and so better able to explore nonstationary processes and their normative implications. By generating scenarios using the input from local stakeholders these authors suggest community concerns, perceptions, and values can be integrated into a formal description of possible futures, helping to build the capacity of a community to plan via education, dialogue, and empowerment.

Isserman, Klosterman, and Hopkins (chapters 9, 10, and 14, respectively) continue the emphasis on the continued need for a shift away from a 'technocratic, mystified' approach toward an 'open, participatory' one. Such a philosophy is consistent with the attitude of the need to 'democratise science' that has been forwarded recently in the United Kingdom, particularly by organisations such as the think tank DEMOS. Echoing those debates about experts and the politics of expertise, Klosterman argues that, despite their technical skills, planners cannot claim any special knowledge about the desirability of given futures, or arguably even their probability of occurring, than ordinary citizens with their lived 'experience expertise' about the changing nature of the region. In turn, Hopkins suggests plans should become 'living documents' that are negotiated and support continued deliberation by multiple stakeholders.

This broad message of the book—to accept uncertainty and embrace participatory approaches—resonates with contemporary attitudes across other areas of environmental science and management. Adaptive resource management, for example, is a process of 'learning by experimenting', updating policies and management strategies as more is learnt about the system in hand. Likewise, Funtowicz and Ravetz (1993) have argued that a new form of 'postnormal' science that embraces uncertainty, individuals' personal values, and dialogue amongst multiple stakeholders is required to solve the environmental problems arising from applications of 'normal', reductionist science.

However, uncertainty is politically undesirable and participation is not a panacea. Accepting uncertainty is disquieting—embracing it is even more of a challenge. Policy makers are often loathe to accept advice based on uncertainty, and where uncertainty is accepted it is often used to delay (tough) decision making. A pertinent example is political unwillingness to address the suggested causes of potential anthropogenic climate change in certain quarters because of the scientific uncertainty in those processes. Participatory approaches demand both the will and the skill to engage with nonplanners. Making the planning process more inclusive is likely to slow it, potentially leading to unforeseen (and unwanted) demands on the planning process and remit. Participatory approaches will demand that planners expand their skill set to learn how to incorporate a variety of perspectives and views into their planning process.

The case studies presented in each chapter show how this might be done, offering practical ways to engage this multiplicity of demands and perspectives. In this light, *Engaging the Future* will be most useful for, or have most impact upon, students and junior planners. Given the emphasis of the book on wider participation in the planning process it should be read by more than just planners and students however. Well-produced with uncomplicated language, useful figures, and a glossary of planning terms, this book will be accessible and valuable both to the policy makers calling upon the services of planners and to the citizens and stakeholders who will be influenced by the outcomes of their actions.

James D A Millington
Centre for Systems Integration and Sustainability, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48823, USA

Reference

Funtowicz S, Ravetz J, 1993, "Science for the post-normal age" *Futures* **25** 735 – 755

Books received

All books received by the journal for possible review are now listed on the *Environment and Planning* website: http://www.envplan.com/abstract.cgi?id=abooks.

All books for review should be sent to the publishers marked for the attention of the reviews editor. Inclusion in the list of books received does not imply or preclude a full review. The opinions given in these reviews are those of the reviewer alone and do not necessarily represent the views of the editors or publishers.