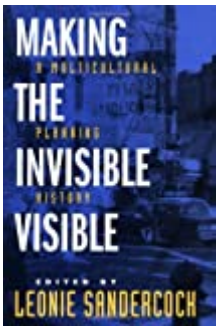
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Leonie Sandercock, ed. *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History.* Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1998. xii + 270 pp. $21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-520-20735-6; $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-20734-9.

Reviewed by Julie Nicoletta (Universityof Washington, Tacoma)

Published on H-Urban (September, 1998)

Redefining Planning's Past

Over the past two decades, historians have subjected the discipline of history to intensive and self-critical scrutiny, re-inventing a more inclusive field that addresses the role of women, people of color, and other marginalized groups. Today, the field of planning history is experiencing the same rigorous analysis. This representation of planning history is demonstrated in *Making the Invisible Visible*, a collection of essays that seeks to present what editor Leonie Sandercock calls "insurgent planning histories" (p. 2). By taking a self-critical approach, this volume, the second in the series California Studies in Critical Human Geography, fills a large gap in the literature of planning history. Though the book focuses primarily on planning in the United States, it offers analytical frameworks applicable to planning in other parts of the world.

Leonie Sandercock, Professor of Human Settlements and Head of the Department of Landscape, Environment, and Planning at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, and formerly a professor in the Department of Urban Planning at the University of California, Los Angeles, has helped shape a new generation of planners and planning historians. In her introduction, she explains that the official history of planning has been "the story of the modernist planning project, the representation of planning as the voice of reason in modern society" (p. 2). This history has generally celebrated order over chaos and the genius of individuals over the contributions of communities. Much of planning history has been written from within the profession, depicting an evolutionary development of the planning profession and its successes. In the process, however, the contributions of "the invisible"–women, people of color, and gays and lesbians–have largely been ignored. Sandercock and her co-authors intend to offer "a broader and more inclusive view of planning" in order to imagine a different future for it (p. 2). To that end, Sandercock considers this collection not simply "as an esoteric intellectual project but rather as an emancipatory one" (p. 2).

Sandercock's introduction provides an effective account of planning history in order to expose gaps that the book's essays address. She begins with the official or celebratory story, using examples such as Mel Scott's *American City Planning Since 1890*,[1] and Peter Hall's *Cities of*

Tomorrow,[2] then moves on to the more recent and more self-critical works that have been published in the last decade, such as Mike Davis' *City of Quartz*,[3] Elizabeth Wilson's *Sphinx in the City*,[4] and Dolores Hayden's *The Power of Place*.[5] In her overview of the literature, she points out that the holes in planning history indicate systematic exclusions that must be addressed through theory. By incorporating critical theory, she argues, planning history will not simply be rewritten, it will open new avenues for reconceptualizing the field.

The body of *Making the Invisible Visible* is divided into two parts, containing essays written by authors from a range of disciplines, including anthropology, architecture, architectural history, and planning history, who demonstrate how planning history can be retheorized. A significant number of essays (six out of twelve) are written by graduate students or recent graduates in the fields of architecture, urban planning, and history, thereby bringing to the fore new work by young scholars. Part I, "Historical Practices," includes five essays on histories of insurgent planning practices, focusing on stories of how planning processes have marginalized and oppressed certain groups. Part II, "Textual and Theoretical Practices," consists of seven essays that reveal the significance of theory in re-shaping the past by offering critical re-reading of planning history texts and applying new methods to the study of planning.

Part I begins with James Holston's essay, "Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship," in which the author argues that sites of insurgence, "the realm of the homeless, networks of migration, neighborhoods of Queer Nation ... ganglandÃs, fortified condominiums, employee-owned factories, squatter settlements, suburban migrant labor camps, sweatshops...introduce into the city new identities and practices that disturb established histories" (p. 48). The presence of these insurgent sites subverts the goal of modernist planning which is to improve upon present conditions "by means of an imagined future." As long as spaces of insurgent citizenship exists, they will help nurture "a productive tension" between the state (modern) and the local (insurgent). Holston, thus, lays out a framework for incorporating and studying the significant role played by those traditionally excluded from planning history.

Of the remaining four articles in Part I, Gail Lee Dubrow's essay, "Feminist and Multicultural Perspectives on Preservation Planning," is the most effective in pointing out the need for preserving long-neglected historic sites and providing specific suggestions for new directions in this area. With the study of American history becoming enriched over the past twenty years with the inclusion of gender, race, class, and ethnicity as fields of inquiry, other disciplines have been similarly changed, thus providing "the potential for using historic preservation as an instrument of a democratic and inclusive approach to planning (p. 57). Dubrow discusses a number of sites that have historical associations with marginalized groups–women, people of color, and homosexuals–and analyzes their successes and failures. Some have been preserved and recognized as significant, such as the New England Hospital for Women and Children in Roxbury, Massachusetts, designated a National Historic Landmark as the oldest existing example of hospitals developed by and for women in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Other sites, however, such as the Japanese Language School in Tacoma, Washington, languish because their bases of support, in this case, the vibrant Japanese-American community decimated by internment during World War II, have suffered from a "long history of exclusion and discrimination" (p. 65). Despite the loss of many historic sites, Dubrow sees positive forces for change, particularly at the grassroots level. In the case of developing a gay and lesbian history, most work has come from community history projects, such as walking tours of neighborhoods in New York and San Francisco. Another force is the increasingly diverse body of planning students and educators that has worked toward expanding the traditional definitions of what is historically significant in the preservation and planning professions.

The following essays in Part I by Clyde Woods, "Regional Blocs, Regional Planning, and the Blues Epistemology in the Lower Mississippi Delta," Theodore S. Jojola, "Indigenous Planning: Clans, Intertribal Confederations, and the History of the All Indian Pueblo Council," and Moira Rachel Kenney, "Remember, Stonewall Was a Riot: Understanding Gay and Lesbian Experience in the City" affirm Dubrow's multicultural perspective. These authors put the experiences of African Americans, the Pueblo Indian nations, and urban gays and lesbians, respectively, into the context of twentieth-century planning processes, demonstrating the persistence of these groups, against great obstacles, to assert themselves in planning and political decisions directly affecting them.

The first four essays of Part II, Iain Borden, Jane Rendell, and Helen Thomas, "Knowing Different Cities: Reflections on Recent European Writings on Cities and Planning History;" Susan Marie Wirka, "*City Planning for Girls:* Exploring the Ambiguous Nature of Women's

Planning History;" Olivier Kramsch, "Tropics of Planning Discourse: Stalking the Constructive Imaginary' of Selected Urban Planning Histories;" and Robert A. Beauregard, "Subversive Histories: Texts from South Africa," provide close readings of planning texts on a variety of subjects to underscore the need for new theoretical approaches in planning history. Of these essays, Susan Marie Wirka's analysis of Henrietta Additon's *City Planning for Girls* of 1928[6] stands out by revealing the complexity of retrieving planning texts written by women. Additon, a social worker in early-twentieth-century Philadelphia, took a critical view of social work and planning policies as they applied to girls living in the city. She criticized social workers' lack of "understanding about how such urban conditions as overcrowding, poverty, unsanitary housing, and the practice of child labor might affect a girl's early development" (p. 150). She believed that planners and social workers had to work together to create urban spaces that satisfied human needs. Despite Additon's concern for the welfare of girls, Wirka argues that the real subject of *City Planning for Girls* is the control of female sexuality, and that its text reveals the author's association of urban reform with moral reform. At the time, professional planners associated the disorder of the city with uncontrolled female sexuality, and thereby sought to impose order by controlling women's access to public, urban space. Wirka asserts that Additon's concern for the moral reform of urban girls "places her squarely in the Foucaultian framework of the disciplining professional–patrolling behaviors, policing norms, establishing new forms for the regulation of women in the city (p. 159). Through her careful analysis of *City Planning for Girls*, Wirka successfully demonstrates that one cannot read Additon's text simply as a feminist tract. Both the feminist reading and the Foucauldian reading indicate not only the complexity of Additon's work, but also the potential for a rich field of inquiry in studying other texts written by women.

The fifth essay in Part II, June Manning Thomas' "Racial Inequality and Empowerment: Necessary Theoretical Constructs for Understanding U.S. Planning History," focuses on the necessity for planning history to take into account issues of race and gender, in addition to those of class and class oppression. Rather than consider African Americans victims of planning processes, Thomas argues, historians must recognize the active role racial minorities have played in fighting for the power to plan their own communities. Such histories can ultimately empower communities. In this way, Thomas' discussion is similar to that of Beauregard's study of recent South African planning histories. By closely analyzing texts, Beauregard discovers a tendency on the part of South African planners to avoid responsibility for apartheid. In addition to denying the past, most of these histories neglect issues of gender and race. The result, Beauregard argues, is a collection of disempowering histories that makes planners appear passive and makes change more difficult.

The final two essays, Dora Epstein's "Afraid/Not: Psychoanalytic Directions for an Insurgent Planning Historiography" and Barbara Hooper's "The Poem of Male Desires: Female Bodies, Modernity, and Paris, 'Capital of the Nineteenth Century,' " tread a different path from the others by exploring the emotions of fear and desire and the psychological spaces they create for urban inhabitants. Both authors make strong cases for the need to consider the influence of fantasy and fear, pleasure and terror, in the creation of planning interventions. Epstein's essay is particularly effective in showing how the concept of "city-fear," fear of the city and of being in the city, is a "construction ... that is manifested, linguistically and materially, within the modern discourse on the metropolis and the metropolitan mind-body (p. 213). Because of this construct, Epstein asserts, planners view the city as a threatening other that needs to be made safe rather than focus on the city's positive and pleasurable associations. Likewise, Hooper argues that the growing association in the nineteenth century between the female body, considered naturally inferior and disorderly, and the chaotic, dangerous city, incited reformers such as Haussmann to reorder an entire city, Paris, on the model of the ideal Enlightenment city. Both essays build on the work of Elizabeth Wilson's *Sphinx in the City*, but employ different theoretical techniques. Epstein draws on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, whereas Hooper employs the work of Lefebvre and Foucault. These approaches demonstrate the types of new paths planning history can take as called for by Sandercock and others in the book.

In her introduction, Sandercock notes two dominant themes that emerge in the book, the theme of planning as an ordering tool and the theme of marginalized groups contesting urban and regional spaces, but she states that there is no single theoretical framework, because the intention of the book is to offer a range of stories and interpretations as a means to rethinking planning's future and make possible the planning for multicultural cities and regions. While this broad scope does allow for a variety of approaches, many readers may find the diffuse overall argument difficult to follow. At other times, the organization of the essays seems problematic. By arranging the

book into sections on historical studies and theoretical approaches, Sandercock can highlight the importance of theory in reshaping the field of planning history. On the other hand, since there is some overlap in content among essays in both sections, it may have been more useful to put essays addressing related subjects together, thus combining content with new theoretical approaches. For example, Clyde Woods' account of the short history of the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission in the late 1980s and the efforts of African Americans in the region to play a role in the planning and development goals of the commission is an excellent example of just the sort of history that June Manning Thomas calls for in her essay.

Also useful to readers would be a comprehensive bibliography divided into sections by field at the end of the volume. Though each essay contains its own list of references, many refer to the same major planning history works while others incorporate a number of other texts from the fields of critical theory, historic preservation, and urban history. A single bibliography would provide a broad overview of the varied works informing planning history, rounding out the more focused historiographical studies that the introduction and some of the essays offer. Finally, though many of the essays are written clearly, some readers may be put off by the theoretical jargon and opaque language of some of the chapters.

Aside from these minor points, *Making the Invisible Visible* is a major contribution to the field of planning history. It will be a valuable text for students of planning and planning history and for readers in other fields for whom the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of planning and its history has shaped their own approaches to studying human geography.

Notes:

[1]. Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1969).

[2]. Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* (London: Blackwell, 1988).

[3]. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1990).

[4]. Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1991).

[5]. Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1995).

[6]. Henrietta Additon, *City Planning for Girls: A Study of the Social Machinery for Case Work with Girls in Philadelphia, With Comments on Present Methods, Brief Histories of Past Experiments, and Recommended Plans for the Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928).

Citation: Julie Nicoletta. Review of Sandercock, Leonie, ed., *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. September, 1998.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2283