

Book Review

Encounters in Planning Thought: 16 Autobiographical Essays From Key Thinkers in Spatial Planning

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Encounters in Planning Thought. 16 Autobiographical Essays from Key Thinkers in Spatial Planning
Beatrix Haselsberger (Ed.)

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The book 'Encounters in Planning Thought. 16 Autobiographical Essays from Key Thinkers in Spatial Planning', edited by Beatrix Haselsberger, is an important addition to the study of planning history and planning theory, and will certainly last as a landmark for all those interested in the way planning thought developed and circulated in the second half of the twentieth century and beginning of the new millennium, facilitating the transference of knowledge and planning ideas between generations of planners and planning researchers. The book is therefore of interest for all those working or with an interest in the field of urban e-planning and in the related professional fields.

The book is a collection of autobiographical accounts written by a selection of some of the most important planning scholars in the second half of the twentieth century. It is organized in 3 parts and 19 chapters. Part 1 ('Introduction'), with two chapters, offers an introduction to the book. In the first chapter ('Encounters in Planning Thought: an Introduction'), Beatrix Haselsberger introduces the book, and Laura Saija in the following chapter ('Autobiography as a Method of Inquiry') presents the research methodology adopted in the book and how these oral histories, in the form of autobiographical essays, allowed the exploration of planning ideas and of how they were generated, in a particular time and context, a process described by some of those that have generated these planning ideas or that have contributed significantly for them.

The second part of the book constitutes the core section and comprises 16 chapters, one for each of these original autobiographical essays written by key thinkers in the planning field, some of which had a decisive influence in the constitution of planning thought in the last half century. The criteria for the selection of these protagonists in the planning history, as all criteria, can be debated and challenged, although the explanation given by the editor for the selection of these 16 thinkers, being clear enough, offers the necessary background information that will avoid any doubt about

the sample and its representativeness. Although not a universal sample of planning thinkers, as it excludes all those that did not publish in English, these essays show, above all, and that is certainly an important lesson for the new generation of planners, that different planning ideas can be adopted in different periods and in different places, and show also how this process can take place, as well as how planners can be active agents in that process. By including thinkers from different generations, the outcome is a long range perspective of how different historical circumstances and places influenced the constitution and evolution of planning thought. The 16 planning thinkers include in this collection of essays are John Friedman, the oldest, Peter Marcuse, Peter Hall, Luigi Mazza, Andreas Faludi, Patsy Healy, Gerhard Schimak, Judith E. Innes, Barrie Needham, Louis Albrechts, Klaus R. Kunzmann, Cliff Hague, Michael Batty, Rachel Alterman, John Forester, and Charles Hoch, the youngest one.

The last part ('Epilogue') has just one chapter titled 'Back to the future. A Personal Portrayal in the Interface of Past Planning and Planning Futures', written by Beatrix Haselsberger. In this chapter, the editor offers her perspective on what has been described by each of these planners, in the respective essay, suggesting that planners and planning researchers shall not follow uncritically mainstream perspectives, and neither shall they conform to external pressures, but ought instead to search continuously for sustainable solutions in their planning options.

In sum, a key message from this collection of autobiographical essays, in which authors also share private things, is that personal circumstances, place, and history shape the way we think and how we see the world of planning. And this is also certainly the case with professionals in the field of urban e-planning. Individual and group world-views and the local context will certainly shape how urban e-planners see and use tech interfaces in their current planning activities and how they articulate it with conventional face-to-face interfaces and analogical planning activities. In other words, urban planners ought to adopt existing planning ideas in each time and context and at same time should be able to develop new planning ideas that will better equip them to address the new challenges with which the profession is incessantly confronted with.

The authors of these essays and the editor are to be applauded for this unusual collection, a mandatory reading for planners and planning researchers, namely for all those working in the field of urban e-planning.

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