Burayidi, Michael A. Editor.

*Cities and the Politics of Difference: Multiculturalism and Diversity in Urban Planning.*

University of Toronto Press, 2015.

424 pages.


*Cities and the Politics of Difference* provides an ethical and pragmatic discussion of the changing characteristics of urban communities in the twenty-first century—particularly in light of demographic changes of resident populations, advances in communication technology, the prominence of a global free market system, and social attitudes towards diversity. Editor Michael A. Burayidi introduces the publication by affirming that the globalization and diversification of cities has critical implications for planning practice that extend beyond economic and social issues, but also influence the design, purposing, and regulation of the urban built environment.

Burayidi’s introductory discussion situates the collection of essays within broader theoretical and practice-oriented discussions of equity and diversity issues in planning. Burayidi asserts the field of planning must acknowledge social diversity and cultural differences as central to its practice in order to be a relevant and effective in current urban environments. Understanding the implications of diversity is most important to municipal practice. It can be difficult for practitioners to respond to growing diversity in resident populations, he explains, because the notion of difference at odds with planning rhetoric such as “serving the public interest” and equal treatment. However, Burayidi contends that a multicultural approach is needed in planning due to normative practices and cultural beliefs that support discriminatory treatment.

The book proposes multiculturalism as a framework to describe the current state of urban communities, as well an approach to planning and policymaking in the twenty-first century. Buraydi defines multicultural planning as a “continuous adjustment of planning practices to ensure parity in access to and the effective delivery of planning services to those ethnic, cultural, and demographic groups that have been traditionally marginalized or discriminated against by the planning process.” Consequently, multicultural urban policy must recognize cultural differences, support the full participation and protection of marginalized citizen groups, proactively address effects of racism and social and economic disadvantagement, and reflect diverse native born and immigrant cultures when establishing an identity for a place.

Buraydi’s conceptualization of multicultural planning sets the stage for a collection of essays that provide theoretical reflection on the current state of the field and prescriptive solutions for practice. The book is organized into five sections: (1) multiculturalism in democratic society, (2) planning for sexual minority groups and Native Americans, (3) strategies for proactively support immigrant populations, (4) implications of physical design for diversity, and (5) cultural competency in planning education, training, and practice.

A number of the authors articulate the need for multicultural planning to urge practitioners to focus on the complex needs of resident populations and assert the need for diversity-oriented discussions to extend beyond issues of race, culture, and ethnicity. Petra Doan positions the LGBT community as currently an underrepresented stakeholder group and demonstrates the complex implications of planning practice for sexual minorities living in and outside of LGBT neighbourhoods and to different segments of this population. Doan provides guidance for planners to address the needs of a spectrum of non-normative population as part of their work. Nicholas C. Zaferatos offers a related discussion of Native Americans, describing how an increased attention of professional planners to tribal planning could help support further autonomy for these groups. Other chapters focus on cities that implement efforts to recognize non-native populations by supporting resettlement efforts and promote “immigrant-friendly” communities.

In addition to advocating for recognition for underrepresented stakeholder groups and proposing new substantive issues, contributing authors consider how a multicultural framework relates to training/education and methods for engaging citizens in the planning process. The unifying theme of these discussion purports for an increased cultural competency within the field. Kelly Main and James Rojas discuss limitations of outreach and participatory methods heavily reliant on verbal communication, creating divides between practitioner and
citizen and native and foreign language and discuss alternative methods, such as Photovoice and Placeit that
deeplight language and focus on visual communication. Siddhartha Sen, Mukesh Kumar, and Sheri L. Smith
describe the educational philosophy of planning programs at three historically Black colleges and universities to
demonstrate opportunities to cultivate a multicultural focus as part of professional training.

*Cities and the Politics of Difference* is relevant to a number of audiences, increasing its contribution to the field.
It is well balanced, providing both an ethical reflection of the recognition of diversity in research and disciplinary
thought and practical support for practitioners.

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Li, Na
*Kensington Market: Collective Memory, Public History, and Toronto's Urban Landscape*
122 p.
ISBN: 978-1-4426-4817-3 (cloth)
978-1-4426-4817-9 (paper)

At the centre of Na Li's *Kensington Market* is the provocative idea that collective memory both shapes, and is
shaped by, the urban environment. Li confronts this notion as an urban planner, and animates it as a practical
and methodological problématique by asking, how can collective memory be accessed and incorporated into
planning theory and practice? Taking the reader through an empirically rich historical tour of the unique
Kensington Market neighborhood in Toronto, she develops and deploys an innovative methodological response
to bringing collective memory into the planning process—the Culturally Sensitive Narrative Approach (CSNA).

Li's CSNA is a call for planners, policy-makers, architectural designers and others to situate their practice
within the specific historical context of the neighbourhoods they work in. For Li, community history is something
to be experienced through the built urban form, the history of buildings, and the collective stories neighbours
tell about those spaces. In order to operationalize this—to access and enter into the historical context of a
given community—Li's CSNA leans on the techniques of oral history. She readily admits that canvassing local
residents for oral histories, as part of the planning process, is a tricky and time-consuming proposition. Yet she
nevertheless insists on it. As she puts it, “we need to spend a great deal of time in the field, with humility and
diligence, and allow residents to tell their own stories at their own pace and in their own terms” (7).

Li recognizes that this approach to planning—or any approach, for that matter—is never politically benign.
The danger in curating histories and operationalizing them through urban planning practice is that marginalized
stories and experiences could be lost and familiar power relations reproduced. Thus Li urges diligent CSNA
practitioners to be reflexive, and to ask of themselves, “Whose past and whose memory are we trying to interpret
and preserve? Which version of history are we choosing to remember or neglect?” (6).

The middle three chapters of Li's tidy monograph put into operation aspects of the CSNA summarized
in the introductory chapter. Li’s approach comes alive against the vibrant backdrop of the ever-changing
Kensington Market neighborhood. Li weaves together a historical narrative of the area while adeptly drawing
on archived textual material, participant observation, and interviews. What emerges is a very readable book with
a wide appeal—likely of interest to urban planners, urban historians, urban anthropologists, and faculty and
students from cognate disciplines.

As a work of scholarship, the book makes two primary contributions. First, it adds to the body of work
focused on excavating the history of the venerated and idiosyncratic Kensington Market neighborhood. Second,
Li’s work makes a methodological intervention into the urban planning discipline. Li’s *Kensington Market* largely
succeeds on both counts. However, in the latter respect, her anthropologically-inflected approach is not beyond
scrutiny. In her defense, Li makes clear that her CSNA is a qualitative approach, focused on “the intangible, the
immeasurable, the priceless” (82). In her desire to bring the particularistic into the planning process, however, Li may be inadvertently miscalculating the impact of broader structural trends on the process of urbanization. She portrays the dynamics of urbanization as untethered and specific, yet as many critical urban planners and theorists have amply demonstrated, as capitalism became generalized across the globe, so to did the processes of urbanization. It would be unfair to expect Li’s book (or any, for that matter) to resolve the ontological tensions between—to put it far too simply—human-centered and structure-centered approaches. However, the challenge nonetheless remains: How to design a progressive, culturally sensitive and particularistic planning methodology which also takes into account the broader structural geography of global capital? Though she’s silent on this matter, Li’s approach—grounded as it is notions of justice and place—provides readers with a sturdy foundation upon which to build.

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Thomas, Ren (Editor).
Planning Canada: A Case Study Approach.
456 pages.

The editor and contributors of Planning Canada: A Case Study Approach must be commended for putting together this fantastic book. As Ren Thomas explains in her excellent introductory chapter, there are substantial differences in the legal and governance frameworks—and therefore planning systems and practice—of Canada and the United States, yet the introductory planning literature is largely focused on the latter of these two countries. Thomas’ edited volume therefore provides a helpful counterpart to the American-centric character of planning textbooks typically published in North America. The book is also valuable for being structured as a collection of more than 30 original case studies, written by authors whose backgrounds range from the professional to the academic. This approach provides a useful window into the realities of developing plans and planning policy—but also of producing scholarship on this process—in the Canadian context, with its distinct set of problems and possibilities for intervention and research.

The book is thematically organized in groups of three to five case studies, yielding eight substantive sections which aim to cover the range of planning ‘sub-disciplines’. The sections are: community development and social planning; urban form and public health; natural resource management; housing; participatory processes; urban design; urban redevelopment; and transportation and infrastructure. Taken together, the case studies cover all of Canada’s provinces and territories and a wide range of jurisdictional scales—from small communities like Elkford, British Columbia and Yarmouth, Nova Scotia to the large metropolitan areas of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Each of the book’s sections opens with a brief introduction and, consistent with the book’s primarily didactic orientation, every case study includes a summary, a point-form outline, a list of keywords and references, and one or two boxes with conceptual definitions that provide instructive insights into planning theory and enable readers to grasp general elements from within the particulars of each intervention. The book also has a very good index and makes excellent use of abundant (black and white) photographs, maps, tables and charts.

While planning in principle aims for evidence-based programs and measures that rely on public participation and careful consideration of direct and indirect impacts on a wide range of stakeholders, the book overall does a good job of illustrating how planning in practice is also intimately tied to evolving combinations of market and political forces. In this sense, the volume will be useful to readers interested in technical aspects—such as developing and implementing incentives to use public transportation, zoning bylaws, or collaborative planning procedures—and to those wishing to learn about the critical role that markets and politics play at all stages of the planning process.
Planning Canada works perhaps best as a textbook, but researchers and practitioners are bound to find in its pages a rich source of information and examples. The case studies typically contain enough background material for readers to appreciate the role of context and contingency in the success or failure of a given plan, program or policy, and the range of topics covered by their authors strikes a good balance between issue-based responses to emerging challenges on the one hand and measures of a more comprehensive and anticipatory character on the other.

Thomas explains in her Preface that many of the case studies could have been placed under more than one section. I see this multivalence of the gathered contributions as a strength, although students and instructors would have benefited from the inclusion of a table suggesting the different sections to which each case study could usefully be linked. In addition, it would have been great to include a set of case studies dealing with the topics of planning “smart cities” and the regulation of platform economy actors such Uber and Airbnb. Despite these minor limitations, however, I regard Planning Canada as an excellent and timely collection that will find a ready audience among students, researchers, and practitioners alike.

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