

Book Review

Connections: Exploring Contemporary Planning Theory and Practice with Patsy Healey

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Connections: Exploring Contemporary Planning Theory and Practice with Patsy Healey
Jean Hillier and Jonathan Metzger (Eds.)

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The book 'Connections. Exploring Contemporary Planning Theory and Practice with Patsy Healey', edited by Jean Hillier and Jonathan Metzger, and developed in close cooperation with Patsy Healey, aims, in the words of the editors, to show the remarkable scholarly achievement of Patsy Healey work on planning since the middle of the 1970's. A second aim is to extend Patsy Healey intellectual trajectory into the future in order to illuminate further investigations in the field of planning theory and practice. Combining reprinted papers written by Patsy Healey over a period of more than 40 years and original contributions written specifically for this publication, what we have in hands is more than a collection of Patsy Healey essays, it is a demonstration of the continuing influence of her writings in contemporary debates in the field of planning theory, confirming the rich and diverse intellectual journey of a remarkable scholar and key reference in the field of planning studies. For that reason, the book is an important tribute to the work of Patsy Healey in the field of planning theory.

Patsy Healey's writings are structured around a number of key ideas. One is that planning is intrinsically a political activity, a non-neutral and non-value-free human activity. Another is that 'betterment', conceived as a process or act for improving the conditions of life for people, is the main purpose of planning, whatever the meaning one give to it over time and space. Linked to this is her idea that this is the work of many and not only of those trained as planners. Planning is seen as a 'contingent universal', the product of ongoing debates we all have as a planning community. For her, there is no universal formula if we aim to develop ethical and inclusionary planning. Patsy Healey work has been focused on the conditions that shape planning practice, but also on how planning can make a difference, by influencing or changing the initial contexts. For Healey, planning should be concerned with social justice and economic improvement for the 'many not for the few'. And as the editors claim and as the title of the book suggests, Patsy Healey work has been a continuous attempt

to make connections across time and place with the aim to make a more democratic planning and through this to promote social justice and economic development for all. The invited papers corroborate these central ideas in the writings of Patsy Healey.

The book comprises 25 chapters, of which 13 reprinted papers previously published by Patsy Healey, selected to represent her research on planning, and 12 original invited contributions, written by authors from different parts of the worlds and with different research approaches. It has also an Introduction and an Epilogue. The invited papers take Healey's ideas expressed in the reprinted works as starting points showing how they connect with new contexts and continue to be relevant for contemporary and future planning scholarship. The book is organized into five main parts, according to the main themes of Patsy Healey work. The Introduction (Part I), written by the two editors, provides a comprehensive view of Patsy Healey academic journey, which they present in three main points: the early career from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s; the sociological institutionalism c. 1988 onwards; the collaborative planning: c. 1992 onwards; interpretive policy analysis, pragmatism and civic capacity: 2000s onwards. The three main sections of the book (Part II to IV) include thematic papers, both those reproduced and the invited original contributions. Each of these parts includes an Introduction by the editors, which set the scene for the reprinted and for the original papers as well. Part V is an Epilogue, written by Patsy Healey, an original text written for this book. The book ends with a list of Patsy Healey's publications (9 pages), starting in 1969 and ending in 2015.

Part II (Normative Perspectives) has 6 chapters and deals with ethical issues in planning, the planning profession, the role of politics and democratization. In the Introduction to this part, Jean Hillier introduces the theme of planning as a normative project in the work and vision of Patsy Healey, in the double sense of 'doing the right thing' (substance) and 'doing it right' (process). This part includes chapters on the planning profession, knowledge, normativity, politics and democratization, offering a well-informed view of how the planning profession has changed during this period. Francesco Lo Piccolo in chapter 4, Jean Hillier in chapter 5, and Mee Kam Ng in chapter 6 offer ample evidence of the continuous relevance of Patsy Healey legacy in the field of planning thought.

Part III (Places and Practice) comprises 13 chapters organized in two sub-sections, the first on the planning development nexus and the other on doing planning work. It deals with one of the major streams of Patsy Healey work and writings: the planning development nexus or of how places are produced and changed. In the introduction to this part, Jonathan Metzger outlines the key terms of this debate on the relations between planning and land and property markets and the impact of planning instruments. From Patsy Healey's papers reprinted in these two sub-sections emerges how she combined over time political economy and structuration theory, the role of agency in planning and through it in land and property development. This belief in the role of agency is also clear in these writings. Patsy Healey points that planning can make a positive contribution to society contrary to what (neo)Marxism suggested at that time. The first sub-section (The Planning/ Development nexus; how places are produced and changed) deals with issues of land and property development, relations between planning and land property markets as well as the implementation impacts of planning instruments. It includes papers by Wendy Steele on 'planning the wild city' (chapter 10), Paul McNamara (chapter 11) on the changing nature of property development or that of Benno Engels (chapter 12) on rethinking the relations between capitalism, urban development and planning.

The second section (Doing Planning Work) deals with theory and action related to local planning authorities and is therefore focused in the practice of planning and its context, a long held concern of Patsy Healey, in particular her interest on how planning works in specific contexts, as well as on culturally and institutionally situated episodes. The first section revisits the diverse and complex influences that framed Patsy Healey initial work on planning theory and practice. The following section shows how the other themes that she explored in the following decades emerged and developed. As the editors emphasize, the work of Patsy Healey reveals a strong commitment to planning, which she sees as an activity that can improve people's lives, although always from a critical point of view, as the editors recognize in this book. Ananya Roy in chapter 17 draws on Patsy Healey's work on

transnational flows of planning theory and offers an interpretation of such circuits of knowledge and techniques. Geoff Vigar in chapter 18 focus on the significance of institutions in making places better, a theme that crosses much of Patsy Healey's work. Jackie Barry in chapter 19 discusses ideas related to Patsy Healey work on travelling ideas in planning theory and the potential negative consequences of transferring planning ideas from one place to another.

Part IV (Transformation Processes) explores, in 6 chapters, issues of planning culture, governance and institutional capacity, which have been at the centre of Patsy Healey work for most of her career. The contributions of Leonie Sandercock, in chapter 23, Zeinab Nouredine Tag-Eldeen in chapter 24 and André Sorensen in chapter 25 highlight, through the cases explored by these authors, the relevance of Patsy Healey work for contemporary debates in the planning field. The ways in which planning ideas travel is also addressed in this part.

In sum, in the papers written by Patsy Healey over the last four decades and reprinted in the book emerges a continuous concern with the question of what constitute the planning project. In other words, of what knowledge is planning made up in practice. She conceives planning as an essentially political practice in a network of actors and structures. Her papers included in this collection express well the way she sees planning: a concept unclear, which is changing continuously its meaning over time and place. And from this she claims in several of her papers reproduced in the book that there cannot be in planning a universal or transcendental 'good practice' or 'justice'. Instead of it, in her writings she claims that planning attempts to promote the 'betterment' of the human condition. And similarly to the invited contributions in this book, which, starting from some of her ideas, confirm the validity of her intellectual legacy, Patsy Healey ideas are also valid references for all those interested in the use and in the impact the new information and communication technologies have in the practice of urban (e-)planning in different cultural and institutional contexts.