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Review Articles and Reports
self-reported health. They highlight issues of concern centring on employment and aspects of the life-course. The theme of the life-course is picked up in the next two chapters, the first with regard to older adults. In her chapter, Rose Gilroy looks at the spatial and social challenges of wellbeing and ageing within an examination of current public policy measures in the UK. Gilroy highlights the importance of the local to older adults, with the home and neighbourhood having strong affective attachment. In his chapter ‘The role of place attachments in wellbeing’, Gordon Jack takes the theme of attachment to place as his central focus, and demonstrates the significance of this for children’s wellbeing and the development of identity in the UK. He presents identity and wellbeing as dynamic processes.

In a chapter entitled ‘Am I an eco-warrior now? Place, wellbeing and the pedagogies of connection’, Andrea Wheeler examines initiatives for more sustainable living in schools located in the English Midlands and northern England. In the following chapter, ‘Is “modern culture” bad for our wellbeing? Views from “elite” and “excluded” Scotland’, Sandra Carlisle, Phil Hanlon, David Reilly, Andrew Lynn and Gregor Henderson examine particular values that characterize modern culture, such as individualism, which may impact on personal, subjective wellbeing, with particular reference to life in urban Scotland. This chapter concludes the cluster of chapters that form the first section of the book.

Section one looked at relationships between wellbeing and place in ways that speak directly to the concerns of policy-makers, looking at wellbeing as an outcome, and some chapters highlighted issues sometimes overlooked by policy-makers, such as the contribution of green spaces to wellbeing. The second cluster of chapters in the book explores the tensions in situated experiences of wellbeing, and begins to contest the mobilization of place as a contextual backdrop. The second section of the book starts with Stuart Muirhead’s chapter, ‘Exploring embodied and emotional experiences within the landscapes of environmental volunteering’. Muirhead examines the connections between environmental volunteering, green spaces and personal wellbeing in Scotland, through volunteering, giving time and energy volunteers contribute to a wider environmental goal.

In the next two chapters the authors allow the reader to reflect on wellbeing and place beyond the shores of the United Kingdom. In ‘Place matters: aspirations and experiences of wellbeing in Northeast Thailand’, Rebecca Schaaf highlights competing visions of wellbeing emerging in Thailand in relation to national and global modernization forces, while the global forces promote individualized aspirations, the national forces value more traditional forms of community cohesion and unity. These tensions are also explored in the following chapter by Melanía Calestani in the context of urban and peri-urban Bolivia. The focus returns to the UK in the next chapter when Karen Scott in ‘A 21st century sustainable community: discourses of local wellbeing’ analyzes the planning and implementation processes of a place-shaping intervention in a deprived area in the UK. The theme of multiple meanings within social and cultural spaces links Calestani’s and Scott’s chapter. In the following chapter Lorraine Gibson focuses on contested meanings of wellbeing between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents in a community in Australia. In the penultimate chapter, Jo Little focuses on personal wellbeing in the UK in the form of the spa, presented as a new therapeutic space. This is a fascinating examination of the spa in terms of gender, the body and identity. In the final, more theoretical chapter entitled ‘Place, place-making and planning: an integral perspective with wellbeing in (body) mind (and spirit)’, Ian Wight attempts to bring the edited collection to a close through highlighting the fact that wellbeing and place transcend individual disciplines and professions, they are about integrations. He therefore concludes the book by suggesting a more integral approach, through the application of integral theory developed by Ken Wilber.

This book is very accessible and the chapters are clearly written, but there is a very strong empirical bias to work undertaken in the UK. That said, the book does address very topical issues, and while the focus is on wellbeing and place largely from the perspective of one advanced capitalist economy, the UK, the issues raised will be of interest to the wider readership of the European Spatial Research and Policy. The book could have been strengthened by the editors writing a concluding chapter, bringing together the themes of the book and pointing to future research.

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In an increasingly competitive global knowledge-based economy, urban planners and policy-makers face the challenge of building and sustaining their cities’ competitive base. But this competitive challenge brings with it a conundrum. In the age of the Networked Society, building competitive strengths means mobilising coalitions, building networks and actively leading change. But once these communities of change-leaders are mobilized, they acquire a life of their own, and can become overtaken by complacency. Whilst Dublin might have been lionized in the 1990s as an example of a city that had built new knowledge-intensive industries, the nemesis of the global crash and the complete collapse of the Irish property sector swiftly dealt with that hubris and its attendant complacency. More generally, cities’ long-term health lies in their capacity to continually reinvent networks and coalitions, as well as their competitive strengths, to continually re-position and re-adjust themselves effectively within global circuits of capital.

Many of the studies of recent years that have attempted to understand this process have suffered slightly from the Dublin syndrome. Most cities have tended to do well because of the long global credit boom. The easy option has been to give the credit for that success to urban governance coalitions in line with the theoretical expectations from urban planning theory. But with cities now facing genuinely problematic times, and successes being much harder to book, it is much fairer to be able to assign success to place specific urban governance particularities. So the time is certainly ripe for a volume that explores these issues in more detail, and in particular, what is the ‘alchemists stone’ of urban governance that can allow places to create coalitions that bring success, and then dissolve or transform them when they reach the end of their life.

This is the academic conversation in which Marco Bonije et al. have found themselves participating, and their ambition in the volume is to identify the urban governance
conditions under which cities can transform themselves to specialize in knowledge and creativity, something they expect will only ever apply to a very limited number of cities. Given the importance of the subject and the timeliness of the analysis, the theme clearly has the opportunity to make a substantive contribution to a pressing academic debate which at the same time has significant policy implications. The volume carries endorsements from both Sir Peter Hall and Allan Scott on the rear cover. Promising 'a uniquely well-researched and informative analysis of a key contemporary issues' and that 'It will become essential reading', this sets the expectations high for what readers can expect in the volume in return for their £65.

The book is structured around a series of seven case studies of cities that have been engaged in attempting to make the switch towards knowledge-based creative cities, and in which those transformative change processes are charted. The seven cities, in five countries, are Amsterdam, Munich, Barcelona, Helsinki, Birmingham, Manchester and Leipzig, and were chosen because they were case studies in a research project undertaken by the authors: there is otherwise no intrinsic logic apparent in their selection. Each empirical chapter has a common structure, providing some background to the city, its long-term developments, more recent trends, its unique position, current urban policies, urban co-operation and competition, and the current policy debate. Each chapter concludes with a format SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats) analysis for the respective city.

At approximately 25 pages each, these empirical chapters form the bulk of the book's contribution. They are framed by a set of extremely brief complementary chapters, covering introduction (6 pages), literature review (10 pages) methodology (8 pages), case study overview (14 pages) and conclusion (12 pages). And the suspicion that this immediately raises is justified – there is no way possible in the very limited space available to actually do anything comparative or constructive with all of that material. All the conclusion is able to achieve is to list the pathways, strengths and strategies of each of the cities, and then in one page to try and draw some more general lessons for the wider academic and policy debates about urban strategies and policy-making for knowledge based urban development. Likewise, the literature review is an extremely rapid and superficial skim through a fruit salad of concepts that really just sketch out 'some theoretical ideas about the essential conditions for economic development, in particular in the spheres of knowledge intensive and creative industries' (p. 14).

In the absence of a particularly strong theoretical framework, the empirical chapters are immediately disadvantaged regarding what they can offer. These seven chapters do at least provide interesting insights into what is underway in the seven European cities. For someone researching one or more of those cities, there might be empirical nuggets that can be extracted and used to build bigger and more theoretically satisfying stories of urban change. These empirical chapters paint a highly recognizable picture of the cities for those that know something of them, and this means that these chapters in themselves have some kind of research value. But at the same time, they read as the first drafts of research reports, the kinds of things that can typically be downloaded freely from project websites, rather than the polished contents of a volume that makes a contribution that justifies its rather high price.

There is a way to write a book like this on the basis of a fissiparous research project, and that is exemplified by Martinelli et al. (2012). The key to success is dialectic integration – developing a theoretically rich framework which guides the case study development, and a case study analysis that, in turn, generates further theoretical insights. Even Martinelli et al. are not beyond reproach, but they at least set a standard for what such a volume from a research project has to achieve before it can 'become essential reading', as claimed on the cover endorsements.

The various elements are not themselves weak, and indeed, the empirical evidence is interesting and could contribute to others' research on these cities. But that alone is not enough to justify its assembly and publication as a high-priced book: the conceptual and concluding material also falls well short of making that justification. The publishers, Ashgate, must take a considerable element of the blame in not pushing the authors beyond their comfort zone, and they should ensure that this does not become a regular occurrence or their imprint will certainly suffer. In conclusion, the best that can be said about this book is that it seems a staging point on an interesting intellectual journey concerning debates about knowledge-based urban development, and I hope eventually to read elsewhere what the authors make of it all.

REFERENCES


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In the foreword of this volume, the former EU Commissioner in charge of the CAP, Franz Fischer, warns that food, rural and environmental security are at risk of becoming a market failure, not only in poor countries but also in many parts of Europe. The adjustment of the post-war CAP to the 21st century circumstances must proceed with no hesitation; however, such a transition requires a better understanding of post-2003 CAP and of its possible reform paths. Avoiding fruitless reflections about the European Model Agriculture, this book invites scholars to focus on the reality checks of the multi-functionality concept. In doing so, it insightfully looks at the multi-faceted impacts of the Fischer Reform as well as at possible future developments, whose discussion is symbolically situated both at the very beginning and at the very end of the book.