

BOOK REVIEW

Thomas, Ren. Editor.

Planning Canada: A Case Study Approach.

Don Mills: Oxford University Press Canada, 2016.

456 pages.

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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

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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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