



Book Review: *Contemporary Issues in Regional Planning (illustrated edition 2002)*

Edited by Tim Marshall, John Glasson and Peter Headicar.

Published by Ashgate Publishers Ltd, Hampshire, England.

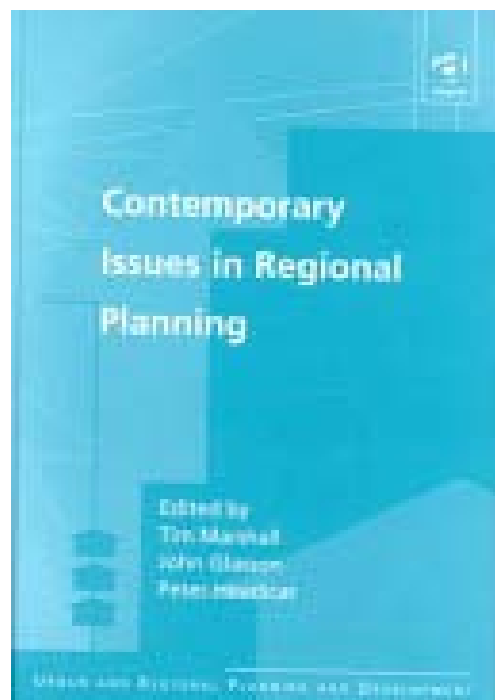
Alice Hosted

Alice completed this book review during her third year of the Bachelor of Environmental Management and Planning at Lincoln University, New Zealand.

Contemporary Issues in Regional Planning is a collection of papers, many of which originate from the Regional Planning and Governance in England research seminar series. The papers, grouped under five headings, are introduced by Tim Marshall (pg 3-19) and concluded in part five by John Glasson (pg 247-264) with a variety of authors from mixed disciplines (all relating to Planning) contributing. This collaboration focuses specifically on changes introduced by the 1997 Labour Government in England to the systems of regional planning, and the issues surrounding these changes to the structure.

If reading this book without a sound knowledge of regional planning in Britain, although illogical, starting with the conclusion is perhaps the easiest way to familiarise with the topic which forms this book. Glasson has a style of writing that not only attracts the readers gaze (as he includes tables and diagrams), but breaks down the complexity of regional planning in Britain into manageable chunks. He identifies the era that this book exists in as possibly the most intensive period of activity for regional planning.

Part II is largely concerned with the frameworks in which regional planning takes place. The frameworks implemented throughout European countries (within and out of the EU), Scotland and Wales are explored throughout part II. As unfamiliar with, (and not particularly interested in at this stage) Britain's planning framework, this section was difficult to read. As with all of the section, the use of acronyms and lack of pictorial explanation of the different regions made it hard to follow and dry. However, Greg Lloyd's paper (pg 54-69) "The Regional Agenda, Planning and development in Scotland" was quiet interesting as it drew some relevance to New Zealand in discussing the importance of public involvement. Lloyd



explains the merits of the Scottish planning system, as community planning is an enforced part of the planning agenda. Could this perhaps become part of England's frame work?

In part III the first paper, by Peter Headicar (pg97-109), brings up one of the most important issues in contemporary planning, the interaction of transport and land use. Reducing car dependency has long been identified (especially by new urbanism) as necessary, however as Headicar points out, a historic lack of policy development involving both land use and transport has made this difficult. The contents of this paper suggest however that there is an unwillingness to address this issue. The remaining essays in this section have an environmental and sustainability focus. Hugh R Howes (pg 125-144) discusses the role the environmental agency plays in sustainable management, and that it has a huge dependency on regional and local planning to achieve some of its aims. Peter Roberts (pg 145-162) explains the past and future of the environmental dimension in Britain's planning systems. He suggests that the future of environmental considerations and the key to more sustainable development is perhaps dependant on the introduction of more effective regional planning, development and management. All of which is already starting to be included at a regional level as an emphasis is being placed on sustainable development.

Part IV's four essays are all case studies on areas of England, and how regional planning has fared. Again, only having a grasp on planning systems in my own country, and very little idea of how it works in a foreign country made this difficult reading. These essays are perhaps not of huge interest unless you are wanting to specifically see how the Regional Planning Body (RPB), Regional Planning Guidance (RPG), Regional Sustainable Development Framework (RSDF) and Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) are working together (and sometimes against) along with all the other acronized departments to carry out the planning process.

Contemporary Issues in Regional Planning is not a book to put on your must read list if entering the planning world, unless, perhaps, you live in Britain. Although not apparent in the title, the book only discusses issues with Britain's regional planning system, some of which could be compared with New Zealand's regional and local government structure. Being written by a variety of authors makes this text easier to read as different styles are apparent and help to retain interest. However, the lack of pictures, graphs and tables does not attract the reader's gaze. The use of acronyms is annoying, but probably not avoidable. The fact that there are over 100 acronyms is an indicator of how many departments, committees, associations, strategies and plans create the rigmarole that appears to be regional planning in Britain. So, maybe if you are wanting to join the brain drain, read up, if not I don't think this text will be on any reading lists for a planning student outside of Britain in the near future.