Book Review: *Making Better Places: The planning project in the twenty-first century*
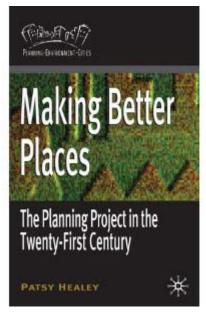
Patsy Healey

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

The ideas and practices that constitute effective planning for the physical environment are and will most definitely continue to be in the future very contentious. It is acknowledged at the present time by many in the planning field that our urban environments need to become more sustainable, with the need for change in the way in which we plan many of our urban communities. The author of the book, Patsy Healey, reflects on the evolution of the ideas, activities and challenges of planning throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in relation to how they have and should shape the fabric and place qualities of urban environments, referring to this as the 'planning project'. Healey refers to the planning project in the twentieth century as primarily being focused on 'achieving wider access to economic opportunities and as a way of developing places in which work opportunities, housing provisions and social welfare facilities for all could be situated' (p 10). The significant shift in the twenty-first century according to Healey focuses on the concepts of sustainability and the need to balance and integrate the diverse conflicting values of political communities through greater community participation focusing on 'place qualities and a way of doing governance work' (p 18).

The various chapters bring together a succession of arguments by Healey on the success of her perception of the planning project in achieving place governance. Each chapter is accompanied by numerous case studies of communities that successfully achieve place governance, reflecting on the efforts that are required in achieving this. The introduction of the 'planning project' (Chapter 1) is further enhanced in the understanding of places (Chapter 2) and governance (Chapter 3). Chapter 2 provides a significant understanding of what Healey refers to as a 'collision of worlds' emphasising the 'multiple flows' within planning and place qualities (pp 31-32). This is where Healey builds the foundations to shift and reflect on the opportunities that the emergence of multi-level governance has created

for more collective planning in civil society (Chapter 3). These ideas address and reinforce the changing dynamics of government to governance, which can easily be associated with various new models of planning that have emerged throughout other literature. These later models of planning move away from top down planning, exemplified by rational planning models, toward greater bottom up models such as deliberative and communicative approaches, which acknowledge the values of communities more effectively. Healey reinforces this shift by emphasising that various communities have begun 'developing much greater confidence to assert its role in promoting liveability and sustainability' (p 96). Whilst all the chapters within the book build upon one another, chapter 5 reinforces these ideas of working in conjunction with communities in various diverse contexts most successfully with reference to possibly the most enlightening case studies referred to throughout the book. The case studies look at the more formal settlements of Vancouver (Canada), Kobe (Japan) and South Tyneside (England) to the more informal settlement of Besters Camp (South Africa) with significant social and political struggles. For those who are in, or are seeking to get into the planning field, the concluding chapters of the book would be invaluable as they emphasise the importance of how technical skills in addition to good ethical duties play a major role in ensuring positive outcomes of the 'planning project' are achieved. This reinforces the importance of taking into consideration community values with Healey reinforcing that planners 'gain respect through the quality of their practical judgments, through the exercise of their craft' (p 220).

The book overall is effectively structured launching straight into Healey's vision of what the planning project involves. There is however a lack of clarity of what the planning project encapsulates from the onset of the book, which is likely created by the broad array of ideas that are loosely being conveyed by Healey. Perhaps this lack of clarity was a strategic move by Healey reinforcing that the concepts in relation to the planning project are broad and continue to be 'vigorously debated and contested amongst those in the planning field' (p 180). Thankfully for the reader this potential hurdle in clarity is redeemed in the closing paragraphs where Healey outlines her five distinctive 'attributes of a twenty-first century planning project' (p 19). Healey's 'positive attitude and normative stance' (p xii) throughout the book I feel has taken away some of its potential success, with the case studies lacking detail on some of the planning obstacles encountered within these communities. Healey rarely touched on any of the negative aspects of the case studies possibly because they would contradict her arguments. If the negatives were elaborated on I feel the quality and credibility of the book would have increased. Lastly the numerous tables and diagrams associated with each chapter are in most cases very useful at complementing the chapter content. Unfortunately in some of Healey's main chapters of argument (Chapter 6 and 7) the tables and diagrams lack clarity, with it difficult to comprehend how they complement the discussion as visually they are very weak, with figure 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 most successfully illustrating this.

Overall Healey conveys the book has been written to revitalise approaches to planning for students and planners (p xi). Reflecting on the book I agree it would give students a good insight into planning, but a good foundation in planning would be beneficial for students prior to reading the book for them to fully appreciate and understand the planning project. Whilst this book is not the first to elaborate on the need for a greater bottom up approach

to planning, it does educate on the ethics of professional practice. This reference to ethics makes a substantial contribution to the books overall effectiveness and will be invaluable in educating graduate planning students or professionals on their ethical duties as a planner. It is essential however to read the book and see how Healey established her position on ethics, so despite the limitations discussed the book overall is a valuable read.