

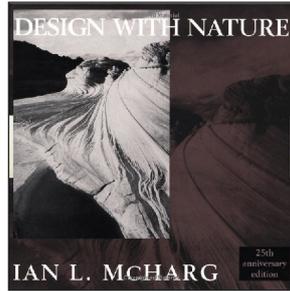
# Student Book Reviews

In the second semester of 2009, SOCI 314 Professional Practice students were required to write a book review as an assignment to help illustrate and understand the range of planning literature. This involved reading at least one planning book thoroughly and discussing them in class. The range of coverage was broad with contemporary to planning classics (like McHarg's) being covered. Some of the students thought there were some that were worth publishing and so did LPR; they are published below. Here are the book reviews of *Design with Nature* by Ian McHarg, *The Unsung Profession* by Caroline L. Miller, *Fuzzy Planning* by Gert DeRoo and Geoff Porter and *Digital Land* by James L. Sipes and Mark S. Lindhult.

## Design with Nature

Ian McHarg. The Natural History Press, New York, NY, 1969.

Review by Ashleigh Grose



The current urban design, planning and sustainability paradigms have their beginnings in the work carried out by author Ian McHarg. The book, *Design with Nature*, published in 1967 is a culmination of his experience and knowledge of planning and landscape design. It was truly ground breaking at the time of publication and is widely recognised as a classic for modern planners and landscape architects. McHarg's childhood was spent growing up in Glasgow. This experience aided an early appreciation for the need for cities to incorporate and accommodate the qualities of the natural environment. McHarg left Scotland and later received an education at Harvard and was awarded degrees in landscape architecture and planning.

*Design with Nature* covers an extensive range of ideas and is the type of book that needs to be read several times to gain a full understanding of the content covered. I believe one of the key messages McHarg expresses is that there needs to be human cooperation and a concern for the natural environment and ecology when dealing with urban design. McHarg explores the relationship between the built environment and nature, using this to illustrate how both can be used to their full potential without having detrimental effects on each other. This can only be achieved through a willingness to recognise the importance of ecology in urban landscapes.

*Design with Nature* was ground breaking due to the scale and complexity of the issues it attempted to deal with in detail. Upon reading the book, it appears McHarg has a close spiritual relationship with the physical environment. This is reflected in the following quote "this book is a personal testament to the power and importance of sun, moon and stars, the changing seasons, seedtime and harvest, clouds, rain and rivers, the oceans and the forests, the creatures and the herbs" (p5). The style of writing is a merger of philosophical and ecological ideas and reflects a deep connection to the physical world. It is also very apparent that McHarg has a distaste for the city, at times referring to it as "... God's Junkyard", "bedlam", and "dead grey tissue encircling the nation" (p23).

The only real criticism I would have of this book is that it reflects the general conviction by academics during the sixties who believed that suburban sprawl was the principal threat to the natural environment. It falls short of the contemporary design perspective, by mainly focusing on patterns of land use. This is evident because McHarg accepts cars as permanent fixtures of the environment, as he discusses how highways can be better suited to the surrounding environment. This attitude contrasts with current efforts to reduce the amount of cars on the road

through design strategies such as New Urbanism and incentives to use public transport. Criticisms aside, McHarg was a pioneer of urban design and of the environmental movement; his work has contributed to and influenced, among many others, environmental impact assessment, coastal zone management, river corridor planning and ideas about sustainability and regenerative design.

During the sixties the environment played a small role in planning, due to the lack of ability to quantify and display spatial information in a meaningful way. This is also due to the intellectual and philosophical perspective on planning at this time. The overlay system which McHarg developed facilitated the development of Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

I would recommend this book to anyone who will have an involvement in the landscape architecture or planning disciplines. This book is the key stone to the way contemporary urban design, planning and sustainability is practiced.