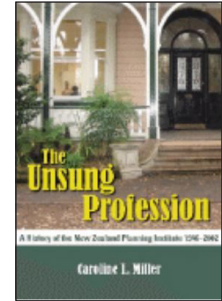


The Unsung Profession: A History of the New Zealand Planning Institute 1946-2002

Caroline L. Miller. Dunmore Publishing Ltd, Wellington, New Zealand, 2007.



Review by Felicity Boyd

Planning in New Zealand is undertaken by a diverse range of people in a variety of different locations and settings. A large number of professional planners are members of the New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI). The NZPI of today is a publicly recognised professional organisation with international stature. While it may seem as though this has long been the case, Miller's enlightening history of the NZPI reveals this has been a fairly recent development. *The Unsung Profession* tracks the progression of the Institute alongside the profession since the beginning of the 20th Century and clearly shows the trials and tribulations both NZPI and its individual members have faced in order to become the self-sustaining organisation we have today.

Each chapter of *The Unsung Profession* addresses a different decade, allowing the reader to understand the general theme of each decade as well as the overall picture of how the NZPI has developed over time. From its humble beginnings as a small, tight-knit group operating under the Royal Town Planning Institute of Britain, it is clear the NZPI has grown considerably since its inception. In each chapter, Miller comments on a number of professional aspects of the NZPI, including membership, education, and professional development. NZPI matters are discussed in detail, and related to the wider community through

explanations of the economic, political and legislative climates of the time which had various impacts on professionals. The NZPI has clearly been on a tumultuous journey throughout the 20th Century, from initial optimism about the future in the 1960s and 1970s to the difficult economic circumstances of the 1980s and further instability of the profession in the 1990s. *The Unsung Profession* provides a logical, comprehensive account of the history of the NZPI that recognises the dedication of a large number of volunteers who have battled throughout the years for recognition and status on both the New Zealand and international stage.

As noted in the preface of the book, *The Unsung Profession* aims to provide a less critical account of the NZPI and planning than in many texts. It is an opportunity for both members and non-members to reflect on the progression of both the Institute and the planning profession throughout the 20th Century and into the 21st Century. While Miller does not hesitate to outline the Institute's shortfalls over this time, the overall feel of the book is that of pride and accomplishment in turning planning into a recognised career. This history of the NZPI outlines the development of a profession, from its beginnings as a small, informal group to the large self-sustaining body it is today. Many aspects of this development are covered, such as the continuing debates within the Institute's Council on issues of membership and qualification. *The Unsung Profession* is a book which allows NZPI planners to bask in the success of their predecessors in establishing a recognised, respected professional organisation despite the many obstacles they faced.

The Unsung Profession provides a comprehensive history of the NZPI from 1946 to 2002. The information presented in this book has been gathered from a wide variety of sources; it is invaluable to have this information recorded together in a historical account. Miller's writing style is engaging - because of this, the book takes on a story-like flow which is easy to read and understand. Despite the many positive aspects of this book, it must be noted that Miller's account often projects the issues of the NZPI onto the wider planning community. It is important to remember that there are, and have always been, a number of planners working in the community who are not members of the NZPI. While it may be true that all planners have faced similar issues over time (such as the restructuring of local government, the introduction of new legislation and difficult economic times) I feel it is unwise to generalise the feelings and issues of the NZPI to the entire planning profession. There are also a noticeable number of errors within the book, suggesting a lack of thorough editing.

It is unfortunate, but perhaps unsurprising, that South Island planning is largely ignored by Miller. Auckland has long held a dominant position in the training and employment of professional planners; however it is important to recognise the work done by smaller, less conspicuous areas of the country, particularly in a historical account such as *The Unsung Profession*. Lincoln University's Ali Memon is barely mentioned, despite his enormous contribution to New Zealand planning. The planning schools at Lincoln and Otago universities are also largely ignored in this history. Miller gained her first qualification through Auckland University and is currently a senior lecturer at Massey University. This bias towards the North Island may be due to the personal background of the author, or it may simply reflect the nationwide imbalance throughout planning history in New Zealand.

The Unsung Profession is a book I would recommend to any person interested in planning, particularly future or existing

members of the NZPI. It provides a concise history of the NZPI and explanations for the way the Institute functions today. There is also a significant amount of general information on the challenges the planning profession as a whole has faced since 1946. *The Unsung Profession* is not a long or arduous read, and is perfectly able to be read over a number of sittings, making it a book that can be easily incorporated into busy lives.
