

## Book Review:

# *Israeli Planners and Designers: Profiles of Community Builders*

(John Forester, Raphael Fischler and Deborah Shmueli, Eds. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2001)

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In the mid 1990s, John Forester devoted a period of his sabbatical at Technion – Israel Institute of Technology to conducting a series of interviews with Israeli planners. He collaborated with Raphael Fischler, then a postdoctoral researcher at Technion, and Deborah Shmueli, a faculty member at Haifa University who teaches planning. The resulting book is the first set of in-depth interviews with Israeli planners, revealing important insights about local planning from an outside perspective.

The book contains 18 interviews, covering planners at both the national and local levels, representing various areas of specialization (architect planners, urban and regional planners, and social planners), and representing both Israel's Jewish majority and Arab minority. The interviews were undertaken during one of the most peaceful periods in Israel's history, when the Oslo peace process with the Palestinians seemed irreversible and the Palestinian Authority was gradually moving towards statehood. It is therefore not surprising that the authors decided not to directly tackle the highly divisive issues of planning for the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. The book does, however, look into the difficulties posed by planning for East Jerusalem and into the relationships between the government's planning authorities and Israel's Arab minority. In the interviews we learn about each practitioner's educational background, work challenges, professional visions, and ethical dilemmas encountered in practice. The interviews are unedited even though English is a foreign language for many of the interviewees, but this only enhances their authenticity. The editors aspired, and succeeded, in presenting "ethnographic windows onto a world of public action" (p. 13).

Forester, Fischler, and Shmueli seek to go beyond theory and tell us the stories of the practice of planning. But unlike Forester's other books on this subject (*Planning in the Face of Power*, University of California Press, 1989; and *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*, edited with Frank Fisher, Duke University Press, 1993), these stories are set in a country that shares common contexts with other democracies and advanced economies, but also stands apart due to its unique history and social and geopolitical context.

National differences have never been a factor explicitly discussed in Forester's planning profiles before, and they are not explicitly addressed in this book. But the profiles in this book cannot be divorced from Israel's diverse people or its sociopolitical rifts. The realities of national security or the controversial issues surrounding occupation are ever present. For those planners who deal with national goals, with Jerusalem, or with the occupied Palestinian areas, these issues shape their sensitivities, actions, and chances of success. The profiles of Farid AbuGhosh, Rassem Khamaisi, Ted Tutchinsky, and the late Raanan Weitz in particular address these dilemmas. Another ingrained part of Israel's identity is its active engagement in encouraging immigration of Jews, regardless of age, country of origin, economic, social, or health conditions. During the early 1990s, just a few years before the interviews were conducted, this policy placed the country in a major crisis as a wave of immigrants suddenly arrived from the former Soviet Union (see Rachelle Alterman's *Planning in the Face of Crisis: Land Use, Housing and Mass Immigration in Israel*, Routledge, 2002).

Israeli planners involved with national land use issues and all forms of housing and environmental issues faced a challenge rarely matched in other countries. The profiles of Dina Rachewsky, Sophia Eldor, Haim Fialkoff, and Valerie Brachia touch on these issues. Israeli social planners face social conflicts and cultural rifts that create tensions within and between many neighborhoods and towns. Interviews with Sarah Kaminker, a Jerusalem social-change agent who builds bridges between Jews and Arabs, and Ronny Shtarkshall, who works with Ethiopian immigrants, illustrate these points. In

assessing the book's utility, one should make a distinction between Israeli and non-Israeli readers. Having used the book's draft version for the past 5 years, this reviewer can testify about the book's value to Israelis. The profiles illuminate planning practice in Israel and richly illustrate differences in planning perspectives. At no time did Israeli students complain that the interviewers misinterpreted some contextual point. On the contrary, it seems that a foreigner's perspective has been able to shed light on what local practitioners and analysts have taken for granted.

For non-Israeli readers the utility of this book may be even higher, depending on their purpose. As the editors mention in the introduction, this is not a textbook on Israeli planning. It does not purport to tell the story of planning in Israel, but rather offers glimpses into the practice of particular practitioners. While the book includes an introductory chapter that does give essential information on the Israeli planning context, this information is not explicitly used by the editors to point out whether, or how, this context differs from planning in other countries or how this context is reflected in the interviewees' stories.

But if the readers, whether planning researchers or students, wish to expand their horizons and learn about planners in contexts other than their home country, this book will serve them extremely well. The special attributes of Israel do not detract from the book's relevance. On the contrary, they combine to provide for a richer, more challenging, and at times more disturbing profile of practitioners than similar studies in Europe or North America. The main value of this book for the non-Israeli reader is to learn how some planners deal with dilemmas that are more extreme than planners encounter in more placid, less war-torn and less dichotomized countries. At the same time, the profiles of Israeli planners also demonstrate that, in many ways, planners everywhere are likely to share similar ethical dilemmas. These include dilemmas about loyalty and obedience to employers versus obedience to one's own professional or personal values, as illustrated in the interview with Avner Amiel; or about how best to reach a quasijudicial decision among conflicting interest groups, as il-

lustrated in the interview with Michael Meyer-Brodnitz.