

**BOOK REVIEWS**

**Michael CLANCY, *Brand New Ireland? Tourism, Development and National Identity in the Irish Republic*, Ashgate, Farnham 2009, xiv + 161 pp.**

In the very week that I was reading this book, the Lisbon Treaty was being put to a second round of voting in Ireland. As it turns out, a resounding majority voted for it this time. The Dutch newspaper reporting on the referendum also carried a cartoon depicting red-haired, Guinness-drinking Irishmen in a pub. To the strains of a fiddle they are belting out a ballad in which they promise never to reject Europe again. The refrain 'And it's no nay never... no nay never no moore, I'll reject Lisbon Treaties no never no more' (*de Volkskrant*, 6 October 2009).

The cartoon (by Jos Collignon) shows the stereotypical image that foreigners hold of the Irish. Disregarding the caricature, Irish institutions do little to correct this image. On the contrary, to this very day marketing in the tourism sector projects an image of Ireland as 'a magical place', as a traditional and harmonious society on the outskirts of modern times, as it were. The Irish are a jolly and hospitable people, simple country folk, almost permanently tipsy but without a mean streak, a people that does not suffer from the diseases of modernity such as frenzy, stress, egoism, anonymity, and environmental pollution. True, Ireland lies within Europe, but it is not part of it – this is how Michael Clancy sums it up in the chapter *Selling Ireland* of his book *Brand New Ireland?* It is an image that does not correspond to the prosperous, urbanised, and industrialised Ireland of today.

Clancy spent a year in Dublin with his wife and children on his sabbatical leave from the University of Hartford (USA). During that year he collected the data for his research on – as succinctly stated in the subtitle of his book – *Tourism, Development and National Identity in the Irish Republic* since the 1980s. Especially during the 1990s, the growth of the Irish economy was unbridled and rapid; no wonder the country became known as the Celtic Tiger. As Clancy shows, its growth may not only be ascribed to foreign direct investments by American computer companies and pharmaceutical concerns, to subsidies from the European Union, and to the successful activities of the Industrial Development Authority (the government agency that is supposed to induce foreign firms to invest in the country). A prominent role was also played by the boom in international tourism. Between 1986 and 2007 international tourism to Ireland quadrupled in terms of visitors and revenues. Employment in the tourism sector also rose at a spectacular rate, accounting for roughly ten percent of all jobs in Ireland.

That growth, as Clancy demonstrates in a separate chapter, was partly due to the emergence of low-cost carriers (the Irish Ryanair in particular, at the expense of the official airline Air Lingus) and the upgrading of the accommodation sector. Up till the 1980s, Irish hotels were for the most part small, old, and independent, while nowadays globally operating hotel chains are setting the standard. Both developments were only possible with government cooperation.

Tourism did not expand without some help. Many governmental and semi-governmental organisations (often rivals) have been involved in promoting Ireland as a touristic destination. Tourism, as Clancy concludes, 'moved from the fringes of economic policy-making to the center' (p. 60). He sketches the break-up of the monopoly of Bord Fáilte, a state-subsidised organisation that, in splendid isolation, was engaged in the promotion of tourism. Governments now take a more proactive stance and forge alliances with the business community, largely thanks to Minister McCreevy who sought to curtail the power of Bord Fáilte. Branding strategies for promoting tourism in Ireland have become much more professional, though the essence of their message remains unchanged: Ireland offers an opportunity 'to escape Europe without leaving it' (p. 93).

It is Clancy's intention for his book to offer more than a mere case study of the relations between global industry, national economic development, state agencies, local firms, national identity, and tourism in Ireland since the 1980s. He also wants to prove his assertion that, when governments resort to branding to convince an external audience of the qualities of the land and its people, they are thereby constructing a national identity for their own population. 'Branding is simply another means through which the state narrates the nation' (p. 27). Further along, Clancy observes that 'as more and more of modern life becomes commodified, tourism branding becomes increasingly effective in constructing national narratives' (p. 97) and, finally, concludes that:

Branding aims to shape the very meaning of Ireland, not only to tourists, but also to citizens [...] In today's world of media and marketing bombardment, branding plays a significant role in constructing Irish national identity. In short, it not only distinguishes Ireland from other comparable destinations for tourists; in a rapidly modernizing Ireland it performs the same role in differentiating the Irish from the rest of Europe or America for its citizens (p. 136).

What this conclusion lacks is thorough grounding in empirical research. Clancy has read countless reports and has spoken with 25 policy-makers and key actors in the tourism sector. Yet he did not interview the Irish themselves, nor did he carry out a content analysis of the media – for instance, of opinion pieces on national identity in newspapers and magazines. Do the Irish see themselves today as a 'pre-Celtic Tiger country', as tourism branding would suggest? I doubt it. His conclusion to this otherwise quite readable book is more of a hypothesis. One final comment: despite the high price, the book is a rather plain publication. It contains not a single picture of posters, advertisements, or any other marketing material.

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**Mark WHITEHEAD, *Spaces of Sustainability: Geographical Perspectives on the Sustainable Society*, Routledge, London 2007, 242 pp.**

As a society we are now constantly reminded of the need to live in more sustainable ways, alerted by increasing evidence that global flows of trade, unsustainable construction projects, over indulgent consumption practices and other activities are having severe negative impacts on the stability of our planet. Debates about sustainable development, initially the preserve of developing world specialists, are now centre-stage in academic and policy arenas. This excellent introduction to sustainability is therefore timely and welcome. One of the book's core strengths is its ability to connect sustainability to wider ideas in human geography, including recent writings on globalisation, new regional geographies, place identity and citizenship. Sustainability is framed as an integrated concept (p. 14) that links economy, environment and society. Tracing the philosophical and geo-political roots of sustainability, Whitehead argues it is a socially constructed category, with different interpretations existing in different places and spaces. This book does more than simply review the literature on sustainability – it shows the important contribution geographical perspectives make to such debates. As Whitehead puts it, the non-geographical literature tends

[...] to (often inadvertently) reduce sustainability to the historical emergence of a singular concept of social and ecological development – that of *sustainable development* [...] A spatial perspective on the sustainable society [...] alerts us to the varied cultural and political versions of sustainability which exist alongside, and sometimes in opposition to, prevailing doctrines of sustainable development (p. 5, original emphasis).

The book is organised into two parts: the first part contrasts the emergence of sustainability in different societies and the second examines different geographical scales. Part one comprises three chapters that examine the operationalisation of sustainability in the West (namely the UK and the US), post-socialist societies (Poland and Russia) and the developing world (especially Kenya). All three chapters provide useful accounts of the ways sustainable development has become entangled into different national contexts, although it is when reading across the chapters that this argument becomes most apparent. Framed around the notion of ecological modernisation, chapter 2 examines attempts by businesses and government in the UK to embrace environmental policies, in contrast to the US which has seen a backlash towards ecological policies. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of 'sustainable heterotopias' – alternative visions that challenge the view that sustainability must be economically compatible, illustrated through an account of a London protest against Western capitalism in May 2000. Varied interpretations again appear when the relationship between post-socialist traditions and sustainability are examined. Sustainable development has thus become a significant symbol for post-socialist Russia, aligned with the spiritual growth of the nation, taking on more emotive tones than business-orientated Western visions. A case study of Katowice, Poland's largest urban-industrial agglomeration, reveals how sustainable development policies are here more 'akin to developing a sense of solidarity with nature' (p. 78), echoing ideals expressed in earlier radical political movements. When placed in developing world contexts, poverty reduction becomes the

core sustainable development goal. After a review of the failings of the Green Revolution (which benefited large agro-industrial businesses), the chapter introduces the work of the Kenyan Green Belt Movement (led by Wangari Maathai) as an example of local sustainability.

Shifting focus from spaces to scales, part two comprises four chapters scaling down from the global, to the regional, to the city and, finally, to the citizen. The aim is to tease out how concerns over sustainability are re-organising different scales of geographical organisation, further challenging uni-linear conceptions of sustainability. Chapter 5 kicks-off by assessing the intimate connections between globalisation and sustainability, demonstrated through the global response to climate change and an interesting case study of the Barents Sea as a supra-national zone of resource conflict and environmental management involving Russia, Norway and the WWF. The proceeding chapter shows how the region has become a key spatial focus to implement sustainable policies. After a review of the regional geographies literature, two case studies of the Ecodyfi initiative (Wales) and the West Midlands region show how sustainable regions can take grass-roots or more imposed forms, with contrasting outlooks on what constitutes a sustainable society. Like other chapters in the book, chapter 7 on sustainable cities takes a familiar format, starting with a broader review of the geographical literature (in this case urban theorists like Harvey and Castells), before relating these ideas to debates about sustainable cities, supported by two case studies. The examples presented are Stoke-on-Trent's health reform policies and Mexico City's plans to reduce city-centre congestion, with sustainability acting to recast how both cities are understood. The final substantive chapter of the book examines the idea of 'sustainable citizenship', considered through two examples of LA21 programmes in Sweden and the introduction of citizenship education in Wales. In both cases, the state is seen to have a significant and often limiting impact on these bottom-up initiatives.

Overall then, this is a wide-ranging and accessible text that will be useful to students and tutors alike. It should prove popular to undergraduate and postgraduate courses dedicated to sustainable development, of which there are now a burgeoning number. It is a little different to what I initially expected – containing lots of ideas and references to wider geographical debates, with fewer practical statements about how we might live more sustainably. I do not see this as problematic. It is, however, a shame that the conclusion is not a little more substantive, given the range of materials reviewed. I was struck, for instance, by some threads which ran through most chapters. Most significant is the constraining relationship between sustainability and the increasingly neo-liberal logic of the market (echoed, for example, in the case study of health plans in Stoke-on-Trent and sustainable development policies in Kenya). Most chapters are also focused on sustainability policies related to particular places/spaces. Some omissions also exist which are surprising, especially the lack of discussion on sustainable food economies and the impacts of more mundane consumption practices. Despite these minor quibbles, this is a book that I would highly recommend to students and researchers interested in sustainable development.

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**Thyra Uth THOMSEN, Lise Drewes NIELSEN and Henrik GUDMUNDSSON (eds), *Social Perspectives on Mobility*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2005, 221 pp.**

The book is an edited collection of nine articles presented in three distinct parts. The editors' aim is twofold: first to understand the complex causal webs in which transport is embedded, based on the recognition that mobility is a precondition of modern social life and to establish *transport studies* as a field of enquiry. A *leitmotif* of the book is sustainability, which provides the differing authors with a frame to couch their notions of mobility.

In the first part the everyday popular social constructions of mobility is illustrated through examples of people's rationalisations for mobility choices made. Each of the essays presented delve into the theoretical literature on mobility and how it is connected and constitutes modern life. The essay's empirical studies detail the ways in which parents understand traffic safety, deal with the notion 'structural stories' as the practice of structuration in discourse, and lastly specify a normative agenda for transport research in terms of sustainability and shared responsibility. The part provides good detailed narratives of particular research that generally serve well in fleshing out the themes involved in popular consciousness, and also gives some practical research guidelines. On the other hand the literature review on mobility present was non-engaging and repetitious.

The second part of the book deals with transport flows on larger scale in terms of logistics and cross border transport. The part works through the various levels of decision making in different firms and the consequences for transport infrastructure demand and through the involvement of actors in the constitution of knowledge about the sector. Here detailed studies are presented again that provide valuable insight into the practical issues involved. Both authors of the second part employ novel research methods and the chapter also serve as a reflection on the methods chosen.

The third part is about policy implications of radical change in the transport sector, here mainly worked through recent deregulation and the counterfactual policy claims of mobility, efficiency and sustainability. Here authors contribute new understandings of concepts such as sustainability, the transport discourse within the EU, quangos, and occasioned civil society through motorway construction protests. Detailed empirical studies provide the backbone of the discussion, build on relevant literature review. As in the previous two parts the empirical examples serve to highlight the practical issues involved and thus the part broadens the scope further as to the issues involved in transport studies.

What emerges is a book that is of great value to politicians and planning officials hoping to survey some of the key issues in today's transport sector. This overview nature of the book makes it a rather loose collection where the same theory is often restated and key terms randomly defined throughout the book rather than at some 'point of departure'. Some of the first chapters were not so eloquently written, even littered with rather awkward spelling errors, but this made one appreciate further the outstanding craftsmanship of some of the later pieces. *Social Perspectives on Mobility* is a valuable resource and should give anyone interested a good look at some of the key issues facing planners in the transport sector, but on the other hand does not so much in elucidating the concept of mobility as such.

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**Michael GUNDER and Jean HILLIER, *Planning in Ten Words or Less. A Lacanian Entanglement with Spatial Planning*, Ashgate, Farnham 2009, 243 pp.**

*Planning in Ten Words or Less. A Lacanian Entanglement with Spatial Planning* draws on Michael Gunder and Jean Hillier previous published articles and book chapters which have been revised and articulated to form this opportune and innovative exploration of ten key concepts in the spatial planning discourse: planning, certainty, the good, risk, smart growth, globalisation, multiculturalism, sustainability, responsibility, and rationality. The book is organised into ten chapters, exploring and demythologising, in each of them, one of these ten frequently used planning terms, or master signifiers (and as the authors emphasise, ten key concepts is not a complete list of a discipline master signifiers), based on empirical examples from Europe, North-America and Australasia. As the subtitle indicates, Gunder and Hillier approach and analytical framework follows Lacanian thought and Lacanian-inspired thought of Slavoj Žižek, and the work of other poststructuralist authors, as well (e.g., Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida). The goal is to give readers a new understanding of what planning is, offering new insights about the role of ideology in the construction of social reality. Gunder and Hillier narrative sees planning as a set of ideological beliefs for its practitioners, and suggests that planning in the 21st century 'should shed its tradition of seeking impossibly idealised end-states through means-end orientated planning' and replace it, the modern and rational instrumental form of planning, by a more effective form of planning, conceived as a 'process of contingent emergence and trajectory without closure'. This de-construction of key spatial planning concepts/terms, from a Lacanian perspective, is certainly of interest for researchers, students, and planning practitioners, and not necessarily only for those with a post-structuralist vision of spatial planning.

The first chapter – *Planning as an Empty Signifier* – starts by questioning whether planning is an art, a science or just an ideology, provides an introduction to Lacanian thought and explains how the concept of 'master signifiers' will be applied to the ten words of spatial planning chosen to throw light on the symbolic character of planning. For the authors, 'master signifiers', in Lacanian thought, are empty words, or signifiers, without explicit meaning in themselves, or as Hillier and Gunder put it, meaning everything and nothing to everyone. While remaining unaffected, their descriptive characteristics will be disturbed and open to all types of dominant re-arrangements (as the authors illustrate metaphorically, an 'empty signifier' is a word that acts just 'like a cup, which can contain almost everything provided that it can be placed into it'). For Gunder and Hillier, planning, which is after all about what will, or might be, the future has elements of both art and science, united by ideology, suggesting that it has always been an empty signifier, in the Lacanian sense, and will most probably continue to be so. In other words, for the authors, at the centre of planning, are human values, desires and aspirations (e.g., smart growth, sustainable urban development etc.), which are dimensions that appeal to our emotions, a characteristic that requires other ways of interpreting the real, and new tools for action as well, when trying to mould the world, different from what has been the practice of mainstream modern planning paradigms.

In the following chapters Gunder and Hillier discuss the other nine master signifiers. In chapter two – *The Lack of Certainty* – the authors discuss the notion of ‘lack’ in Lacanian thought, how it relates with spatial planning, and how it inspires desire for a particular planning solution or for specific policy procedures, which is, in their opinion, the reason for the popular support that spatial planning has within our contemporary society. This is followed in chapter 3 – *Prescribing the Good* – by the assessment of the concept of ‘good’, from a Lacanian perspective, and in particular the notion of ‘good’ urban behaviour and how this is or can be shaped. The master signifier risk is explored in chapter 4 – *The Haunting of Risk* – through the discussion of the desire for certainty, while part of the human idea of ‘good’. However, for the authors, this ontological nature of planning, the provision of a false impression of certainty towards the future weakens its ability to take on new and emerging problems, as well as the unknown. For that reason, modern planning paradigms, in their different historical configurations, being largely solution-driven, revealed always enormous difficulty in dealing with the new and the unknown, a facet well documented in the vast library on the twentieth century spatial planning history in developed countries.

In the next three chapters, Gunder and Hillier define and use the Lacanian concept of ‘jouissance’ (pleasure) and the Lacan theory of the four discourses, questioning in whose interest is the city being planned and managed. The authors discuss the signifier ‘smart growth’ (chapter 5 – *Is Smart Growth Dumb?*), globalization (chapter 6 – *Pressures of Competitive Globalisation*), and multiculturalism (chapter 7 – *Multiculturalism: The Other Always Steals My Enjoyment*), in this case drawing in part on Žižek’s work, highlighting the fact that difference is a constitutive element of contemporary metropolitan cities. This part of the book explores the dominance of liberal global capitalism and its influence in the values that guide the making of contemporary cities, arguing that urban management is determined to a great extent by the imperatives of economic globalisation. For these reasons, spatial planning should be dealt with in different terms of those that have been used in the past by different modern planning paradigms.

In the last three chapters, Gunder and Hillier explore the notion of sustainability (chapter 8 – *Sustainability of and for the Market?*), responsibility (chapter 9 – *Responsibility to Whom?*), and rationality (chapter 10 – *Beyond the Mere Rationality of Planning*), as master signifiers, in the Lacanian sense. For the authors, sustainability is now the prevailing spatial planning narrative, perceived as a discourse that works essentially to maintain the priority of economic growth for achieving economic competitiveness. The following discussion on ‘responsibility’ is focused on a perspective of planning ethics that is globally conscious, and so distinguishes itself from the traditionally local and place-based concept of responsibility in urban planning. In the last chapter, the discussion of the signifier ‘rationality’ suggests, contrary to the prevailing opinion within the planning community, that the rationality that is behind modern spatial planning paradigms is more an appraisal of desires than an evaluation of facts.

In sum, all considered, the exploration and discussion of these ten key planning terms, illustrates, from a Lacanian perspective, how spatial planning might deal with the new problems, with the different and even the unknown, in our contemporary cities and metropolitan areas, and how it can take advantage of emerging possibilities, doing open and inclusive choices, instead of the traditional focus of spatial planning on a prear-

ranged pseudo neutral technical discourse that defines the way for a few idealised end states. The authors' interpretation can lead to a different perception of spatial planning, an improved understanding in their opinion, and perhaps make readers of this book better planners and planning researchers, even if they do not agree with the underlying argument, rooted as it is on Lacanian concepts and theories. In that sense, this is a valuable approach for the interpretation of contemporary spatial planning, an approach that sheds new light, certainly a different one, on the nature and purpose of spatial planning, which, in Michael Gunder and Jean Hillier opinion, has been and continues to be mainly ideological, living in the sphere of our dreams, fantasies and desires. If the proposed approach illuminates problems planners tend to obscure and makes them aware of key planning issues, and I think it does, then planners will probably be in a better position to deal with contemporary urban and metropolitan challenges, old and new, known and unknown, in this increasingly global urban world.

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**Colin JONES and Craig WATKINS, *Housing Markets & Planning Policy*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2009, 215 pp.**

This stimulating book has as its general theme the relationship between public policy, planning and housing market and it draws on the series of local-level studies of market and submarket dynamics. As the authors state in the introduction, the aim of this book is to argue that effective planning decisions must be underpinned by a detailed understanding of the economic structure and operation of the housing system. There are four key objectives (p. 8):

1. Introducing the main policy challenges that contextualise planning for housing in a market system (with particular reference to the UK);
2. Exploring the ways in which, in extensive international literature, economists theorise urban (local) housing markets and consider the extent to which a framework that emphasizes segmentation can help enhance our understanding of the workings of the owner-occupied sector;
3. Undertaking a critical evaluation of the current system of planning for housing based on an examination of the way in which planning decisions are made locally and the aggregate impacts of these decisions and the policies that frame them;
4. Considering how the system of planning for housing might (or ought to) operate to better steer housing markets.

Following the Introduction, which briefly outlines the structure and content, the book is divided into three parts. The first part begins by summarising the context to the housing market in terms of demographics and tenure. Chapter 2 provides also an overview of house price trends at the regional and national levels (explained in large part



by macroeconomic forces in the form of economic growth, real incomes or interest rates), looking in particular at the role of the first-time purchasers and the new supply. This review leads to the analysis of affordability problem which draws out both, its growing size in the UK and its changing spatial pattern (authors notice that there are some neighbourhoods of low-demand housing in cities that exist parallel with affordability problems). The chapter examines also the economics of the house building industry and considers the wider planning policy context to analysed trends – in the last section the chapter turns its attention toward the government's response to the affordability problem.

The second part of the book (containing chapters 3 to 5) goes into the structure and operation of local (urban) housing markets. Chapter 3 offers a discussion of market definitions and presents different mainstream economic approaches to conceptualising the spatial structure of local housing markets. The first section outlines an economic model of an urban housing market. This framework provides a starting point to explore the theoretical implications of planning policies for the spatial distribution of house prices and housing densities. In the following section the analysis turns to review of the empirical evidence on the impact of the planning system on the housing markets (early contributions, Cheshire and Sheppard studies, Cambridge land economy studies, Heriot-Watt University studies). In the final part of the chapter the analysis is extended to view urban housing markets within a wider regional context – it examines systems of local housing market areas (HMAs). This section reviews the details of three studies in different regions: the West of Scotland, the North West and the North East of England – it presents the implications of changing definitions and relationships between HMAs and travel to work areas (TTWA).

Chapter 4 considers the internal structure of local housing markets. It starts with arguing that urban housing markets are highly segmented and should be conceptualised as a set of interrelated submarkets. The next sections explores the origins of submarkets and also the theoretical rationale for submarket existence. This provides a basis for reviewing the definitions of submarkets. The chapter also discusses the problem associated with identification and delineation of submarket boundaries. The final section highlights some problems connected with incorporating the notion of submarket into mainstream economic analysis of urban housing markets.

Chapter 5 focuses on the the dynamics of housing markets at different spatial levels (regional, urban, submarket and neighbourhood). It starts with considering the microeconomics of decisions households make about investment in housing and then notes the importance of migration flows as explaining the dynamics of house-price trends. The further part of the chapter considers the neighbourhood change (including disinvestment, decay, gentrification and revitalisation). The analysis shows that the planning system has a crucial influence on the reconfiguring of the internal structure of the market and redefining the spatial distribution of house prices.

Planning for housing market is the focus of the final part of the publication, containing chapters 6 to 8. The first section of chapter 6 refers to the relationship between the British planning policy and urban economic development. The authors go on with considering the key changes with respect to the housing tenure structure. These issues provide the context for a review of the evolution of planning for housing markets,

followed by the analysis of current practise in this field. The chapter also reflects critically on the role of household projections, affordability targets and background assessments of housing market conditions – Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs) and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments (SHLAAs).

Chapter 7 looks more fundamentally at the relationship between planning policies and the market and contains a brief reminder of the housing policy context. It also analyses the planning impacts in terms of policies implemented to provide affordable housing, to create a social mix by planning agreements and to achieve sustainable development.

Chapter 8 draws together and underlines the key conclusions as a way forward for planning the housing market.

This volume provides useful insights into the workings of the housing market and develops a more detailed and broader discussion about the effectiveness of the planning system. The authors see planning as a broad range of spatial policies rather than as a narrow set of regulatory functions and offer a constructive assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the planning policy and practice. Presented analyses were built on a strong theoretical basis drawn from housing economics. These features make *Housing Markets & Planning Policy* a valuable text for students of land economy, urban planning and housing and urban studies, as well as for academic researchers, policy-makers and planning practitioners.

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