

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

LEONIE SANDERCOCK, *Cosmopolis II: Mongrel cities in the 21st Century*. London and New York: Continuum. 2003, xiv + 271 p. Index. Images by Peter Lyssiotis

Although *Cosmopolis II* started out as a second edition of Sandercock's 1998 book *Towards cosmopolis: Planning for multicultural cities* (Chichester and New York: John Wiley), it soon turned into a sequel. The 'mongrel' epithet, borrowed from Salman Rushdie, is meant to celebrate the cultural hybridity, intermingling and 'impurity' of today's cities. The book's central questions are how can all of us urban strangers live together harmoniously, and how should planners help us do so?

The answers revolve around three themes. First, Sandercock fills in what traditional histories of urban planning have left out. She deconstructs the grand narrative of city-building by rational, disinterested planning heroes (usually white and male), and gathers some of the "insurgent planning histories" (pg. 38) of other city-, or rather, community-builders: women, ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, and indigenous peoples. Sandercock's arguments will be familiar to social scientists who have reflected on what and who has been marginalized in their own disciplines, but her concise critical resumes of other scholars' works provide a useful guide to urban planning literature.

Secondly, Sandercock embraces multiculturalism as a guiding policy, meaning that each city-dweller should enjoy the "right to difference" – to have their own inescapable yet shifting and contestable cultural identity – and the "right to the city" – to take up public space in the planning process and on the streets. However, as her readings of Richard Sennett, Ash Amin and others make clear, there is a fine line to tread between, on the one hand, reducing multiculturalism to mere indifference to difference, and on the other, expecting a deeper level of involvement between people from different cultural backgrounds than is likely in urban settings, where sociability is typically distant.

The problem is that Sandercock's solutions seem to fall on the prescriptive side of this line. Following Amin, she advocates habitual, banal intercultural interaction in particular kinds of local places: neighbourhood community centres, youth clubs, regeneration schemes and so on. She cites inspiring examples, from Australian and South African cities as well as Western European and North American ones. But the accounts of these

projects lack conflict and detail, and sometimes come across as if cribbed from evaluations written for funding agencies (particularly in chapter 6). More critically, Sandercock does not explain how to reach people who do not participate in such schemes. Her multicultural society sounds like a demanding one: belonging to it “needs to be based on a shared commitment to political community” (pg. 103). What about those citizens who won’t or can’t commit, through disinclination or suspicion or lack of time?

I suspect Sandercock would respond by saying that urban planners, policy-makers and practitioners should still try to make their processes as inclusive as possible. This is the third and, to my mind, strongest theme of the book. Sandercock investigates creative, “transformative” planning practices which draw on alternative ways of knowing – through contemplation, for instance, or seeking out local people’s tacit, concrete knowledge and recognizing their fears and desires as well as their ‘objective’ needs. Best of all is her thought-provoking reflection on the power of story in planning. Using memorable cases, she shows how “[t]he way we narrate the city becomes constitutive of urban reality, affecting the choices we make, the ways we then might act” (pg. 182). So a dispute about the use of urban aboriginal lands might involve two conflicting core stories: the indigenous people’s story of ‘paradise lost’ versus the colonists’ story of ‘bravery in the face of adversity’. Creating a safe forum for all to tell their stories – and imagine together a feasible future story – is one way a planner could help resolve the dispute. Sandercock also urges planners to make their own ‘stories’ persuasive, and to think about why powerful urban storytellers are heard more often than others.

Sandercock’s strength is that she bridges disciplines, bringing insights from sociology and anthropology into the world of urban planning and vice versa. *Cosmopolis II* seems more oriented towards the planners, which might explain its normative leanings and failure to explain how planners deal with people who won’t be planned. But social scientists, particularly those working at the ‘applied’ end of their disciplines, will appreciate Sandercock’s approach to stories, which puts them on a much more practical plane than, say, the past twenty years’ debates about narrative in anthropology.

Finally, *Cosmopolis II* is illustrated with a set of Peter Lyssiotis’ haunting photo-montages – medieval fortifications ringing a modern central business district, a skyscraper with a lion’s maw about to devour a plateful of pasta with anxious-people-sauce... This is proof of Sandercock’s willingness to engage with the symbols and emotions of the city, and it would be great to see more academic authors enter into such audacious creative collaborations.

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