

Sultana, S. (2009). *Planning the Good Community: New Urbanism in Theory and Practice*, by Jill Grant. Routledge, New York. 2006. *Southeastern Geographer*, 49(3), pp. 308-315. doi: 10.1353/sgo.0.0055

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REVIEWS

Planning the Good Community: New Urbanism in Theory and Practice.

Jill Grant. Routledge, New York. 2006. 296 pp. \$138.50 (Cloth), \$52.50 (Paperback). (ISBN: 978-0415700757)

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Unlike many others, Jill Grant began her career in anthropology and migrated to the planning field in an effort to solve some of the socio-economic problems (e.g., inequality and sustainability or powerlessness in cities) she observed. Her work history and interests span different locales in Canada from the United States border to the Arctic and in Asia from Papua New Guinea to Japan. She has exhibited a long interest in the values and core ideals planners bring to their work and her current book, *Planning the Good Community: New Urbanism in Theory and Practice* is an examination of the values and ideals of the New Urbanists in Europe, Asia (specifically Japan), and North America.

Exposing the subtle irony of New Urbanism is a recurring theme and an initial reading brings to mind a recent television commercial selling plumbing fixtures: picture a wealthy, 40ish couple, smartly dressed and seated across a multi-thousand dollar glass desk from the head of a large and successful architectural firm. The architect is quite the artist, with the obligatory collarless shirt and ponytail, hands steeped in deep thought as he prepares to respond to his new customer's request. If you have seen this Moen Faucets

commercial, in which the rich clients commission an iconoclastic architect to design a new home around one of Moen's new faucets, then you will readily understand Jill Grant's deconstruction of the New Urbanism movement. Her book is divided into three sections containing a total of nine chapters. Section one critically examines the rise of new urban approaches that led to the New Urbanism movement followed by an in-depth discussion on New Urbanism in practice, providing case studies from the US, Canada, Europe and Asia in section two. In the third section Grant included few chapters, which offer future prospects for the New Urbanism by incorporating practice and theory.

As expected, Grant started her book by repeating the historical, conceptual and principles background information of New Urbanism. Her first table lays out the key values of planning in modern planning movements, and she lists all the past and current popular buzz words: garden city, neighborhood planning, healthy communities, sustainable development, New Urbanism, urban villages and the newest buzz word, smart growth (p 21). The buzzwords set the stage for an examination of what often goes wrong in planning.

Whether it is planning development in new communities or planning military battles, the inevitable problem arises: the dichotomy between the tactic of choice and the applicability and potential success of the overall plan. Prussian General Helmut von Moltke (New York Post 2008) compressed this dichotomy with his famous quote “no battle plan survives contact with the enemy.” Peaceable municipal planners need only substitute “developers,” “politicians,” “media” and/or “economics” for Moltke’s enemy.

George Orwell (1948), who coined the term “newspeak,” and Robert Moses (Kaufman 1975), the Planning Czar of New York City, must chuckle from beyond the grave at this example of covering word-smithing with the fig leave of planning for the public interest. The mantra hits all the key words. The bad to be avoided is disinvestments, sprawl, separation by race and income, and social and economic problems. The good is to introduce is economic vitality, community stability, and environmental health. Three of four key ideals are nearly mutually exclusive: the community should be diverse (yet the new community is too pricey for middle and lower income residents and poor residents are being displaced). Pedestrian travel, transit and cars must be accommodated (hopefully not all in same space, otherwise someone might get hurt). Common space brings the neighborhood or town together. Finally, local design must be supported (is that the English Village in Southern California or the New York Row Houses along the Florida Coast?). Grant’s deft dissection of these diametrically opposed goals makes any attempt at describing them a crude bludgeoning.

It is no doubt that the New Urbanism is

selling an ideal lifestyle: a planned community, which is orderly, safe, and above all attractive to local governments and to homebuyers who can afford the price of the perfect community. New Urbanism is the most recent example of the triumph of high style over substance, yet when veiled as a community planning tool, the pretty pictures and expensive charrettes conceal an urban idea that is as admirable as it is frightening—the perfect community, housing the perfect residents. The idea began in San Francisco and the above principles were articulated after a retreat in Yosemite National Park, hence the manifesto is also known as the Awahanee Principles. The irony is rich. The Awahanee is one of several dozen examples of “parkitecture,” the development style of the western national parks such as that found in Yosemite, the Grand Canyon, and Yellowstone, growing out of a convergence of the East Lake, Queen Anne and local vernaculars. As most visitors to Yosemite, Yellowstone, or the Grand Canyon will attest, the parkitecture is beautiful, but it is also wholly artificial, an architectural statement of man’s mastery over the natural materials of the native environment. Moreover, who enjoys and visits America’s western national parks? It is not the poor; it is the class who can afford multi-day travel either through their economic wherewithal or on the cheap like a college student during summer break.

Whether it is Laguna West in California, designed by Calthorpe or Seaside designed by Duany, Plater-Zyberk, critics have had time to notice that the communities are exclusive, are expensive, and are fully dependent on automobiles and above all physically attractive and great for the local tax base. New Urbanism is the Or-

wellian city manager's dream: high taxable development, densely packed, providing a high rate of tax return per acre, and demanding a lower level of public services than communities populated by the poor. Given most Americans' general lack of historical knowledge, these new communities seem to make a Walt Disney version of America.

Grant quickly suggests in a veiled tone that economic constraints and human psychology cannot be separated from planning strategy or tactics. Her main thesis that New Urbanism is akin to the search for civility and the execution of what is "good" in society. In this sense, good planning, and New Urbanism in particular, is a substitute for a dogmatic religion or a benevolent liberating army that seeks to control the masses.

While Grant does not go as far as to suggest that the New Urbanists derive their planning philosophies from Albert Speer or Mao Tse Tung, she notes the inherent hypocrisy imbedded with master planning of new construction, for those that can afford the new construction. One of the most hackneyed military chestnuts is that that no war plan survives the first contact with the enemy. Grant's seed takes root to say, no planning theory survives the implementation phase. In several sections of her book, Grant notes that the New Urbanists are at war with the Modernists and reminds the reader that these warring camps represent a tactical element of planning, not a comprehensive or strategic foundation upon which good planning theory is built. Grant underscores the nature of the New Urbanists as tacticians who seek to change the world for the better by imposing a new exterior or façade that essentially covers up underling social and

economic problems that are not easily tractable either through political reform or direct infusion of resources. New Urbanists tend to be architectural style groupies, not adherents to planning doctrines (p 201). Form is divorced from underlying functions such as economic, political, and social issues (p 204).

On Canada, Grant raises the question of supposed sustainability in regards to "New England brownstones popping up in farmer's fields (p 169)." She notes that Canada's different governmental system from the United States, which allows local governments to more easily implement planning rules and regulations, thus facilitates New Urbanism through ordinances, where such ordinances are economically feasible. Much of Canada is not growing rapidly, making New Urbanism a costly luxury. Un-said in her book are the fundamental differences in demographics of the major cities in Canada and the United States. The United States is mostly white from European decent, but Canada is even whiter. In Canada the second largest ethnic group is Asian followed by Native Americans. In the United States, African Americans and Hispanics are essentially tied as the second-largest ethnic group, with Asians a distant fourth. This makes for a distinctively different ethnic makeup in comparable cities between the United States and Canada. While Vancouver and Seattle may resemble each other from the standpoint of an ethnic mix, the same cannot be said of Toronto and Detroit or Montreal and Boston. Grant thinks Canada is the "bright spot" for New Urbanism, despite its failure to address dependency on automobiles, affordability, and western development. Perhaps Grant is implying that Canada's ethnic mix is such that the density and cost of

new urbanism is more palatable, more acceptable than it is in the United States.

As for the United States, Grant is less hopeful. She uses the perceived success- or lack of success- of HOPE IV projects in the United States to form the core of her argument that New Urbanism, especially in the United States, is an ironic exercise in architecturally driven gentrification. HOPE IV is the name of high profile program to replace the ill conceived, almost Soviet-style community housing projects constructed in the United States between 1945 and 1980 with housing that physically simulates attractive single and multi-family neighborhoods. A major program of the Clinton Administration, Grant notes that HOPE IV has externalities. East Lake, a HOPE IV project in Atlanta, culled 349 of 428 families that lived in the original housing project with screening processes that eliminated those with criminal records, drug use, and poor payment histories. "Some poor families ended up worse off after HOPE IV than they were before. Many simply moved to new ghettos in the inner suburbs" (p 95). Providing the poor a more aesthetically pleasing home does not address the underlying issues that cause poverty, or creates an environment where the poor can actually retain that home since the increase in property value will result in an increase in property taxes.

Grant finds that New Urbanisms are essentially irrelevant in Japan. This is an example of her anthropological sensibilities rising to the fore. She is cognizant that while Japan has adopted a number of Western characteristics, Japan is still an Asian society and its sociological and cultural sensibilities are not rooted in Western European history. The concept of land ownership, relationship of the local gov-

ernment to the citizen and the Japanese' "eclectic and pragmatic" tastes, makes Japan infertile ground (p 148). She sums up her assessment saying, "new urbanism may draw on the principles that underlie patterns in Eastern cities, but it cannot speak effectively to the cultural values and behaviors that accompany Oriental urban forms (p 149)."

Grant seems to intuitively understand that communities, cities and towns, particularly in the Western tradition, are rooted in concepts of single ownership and commerce. As an anthropologist, she understands that communities form around trading locations and particularly in the United States around land subdivisions, rarely envisioned rarely to create a better society but instead to create some wealth for the subdivider. For every Salt Lake City founded for and by Mormons or Salem, North Carolina (now part of Winston-Salem) founded for and by Moravians, there is a Raleigh, North Carolina, Austin, Texas, Kingsport, Tennessee, Coral Gables, Florida, Columbia, Maryland and a Reston, Virginia. At some point in time, people have found good and bad with all these communities, not to mention the metropolises of New York, Chicago, Toronto, London, and Tokyo. Grant understands that what the New Urbanist defines as good is not planning theory, but a taxable and tangible community result. Grant sums up her analysis noting,

"People like attractive places, but they define a wide array of places as attractive. We find little consensus of the shape of the good community over time and space. While classical principles certainly have their adherents, they are not universally loved. The good community can come in a variety of shapes. What might be common

about the concept of the good community is the state of mind and body of its inhabitants, rather than shape of its streets and squares. That is, in the good community, people can be healthy, happy, and productive" (p 227).

Planning the Good Community: New Urbanism in Theory and Practice is must read for any budding planner or student of geography, planning or design. Without resorting to easy attacks and hyperbole, Grant pulls the veil off the New Urbanism and shows it to be not a planning theory,

but an architectural vision. It's not that the vision is bad, but like a mirage, the reality is always less than the vision.

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Talking Taino: Caribbean Natural History from a Native Perspective.

William F. Keegan and Lisabeth A. Carlson. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa. 2008. 160 pp., 40 illustrations, 15 color plates. \$29.95 paper. (ISBN: 0817355081)

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Talking Taino is based on several decades of archaeological and natural history research and observations of the Caribbean by the two authors. While I initially cringed at the thought of reviewing an archaeological text, *Talking Taino* is far more than "just" an archaeological study of a specific region and extinct culture. This book indeed covers a variety of archaeological topics, but it also sheds light on cultural history, cultural ecology, natural history, and regional history in the Antilles. As a result, this book will appeal to a broad array of individuals interested in the Caribbean, including both scholars and the curious traveler.

Talking Taino is divided into 25 chapters, plus three appendices containing Taino names for plants, animals, and general vocabulary. Most of the chapters are quite short, which leaves some questions

unanswered, but overall, this approach appealed to this reader because the book covers so much ground. Yes, the coverage is brief, but interesting and diverse. For example, chapters include discussions of shark and rays (and attacks), Taino fishing and fish, birds exploited by the Taino, economic botany, cannibalism or lack thereof, pre-contact migration and settlement, material culture, and the Spanish "translation" of Taino language and larger culture. The book also examines the links between past and present land use activities and the specific resources exploited by the two cultures. While this at times seems awkward given the Taino are an extinct culture, the authors thread together many interesting comparisons based on their archaeological work and their extensive interactions with present-day island inhabitants.

The book contains a large number of