



## Book Review

**Sustaining Human Settlement**, Roderick J. Lawrence (Ed.), Urban International Press, 2000 North Shields, 407 pages, ISBN: 1-872811-04-3.

This is a carefully selected and consistent volume of papers on urban environmental issues. Its particular contribution to the growing literature in this field is insinuated in the title: sustaining human settlement (rather than, say, sustainable cities), which suggests a concern for the quality of urban life over and above hard environmental issues or ecological determinism. The editor Roderick J. Lawrence (University of Geneva) argues the need for an integrated approach in which '... health, social, housing and environmental policies should become important components of quality of life in cities and towns' (p. 4). In fact, the scope of the book is even wider, including issues such as transport and infrastructure, and is orientated towards the planning and management of settlements.

The underlying social concern of this book provides its basic unity and coherence. It therefore deserves to be specified (it is not, in the book): a liberal view based on the belief in individual freedom of choice and community responsibility, a woolly conception of equity and social justice, faith in rational thought and communication, participatory democracy, incremental and consensual change, and an essential optimism in the human condition.

These virtues have been shown to have severe limitations in the quest for sustainability, but should not be disparaged given the narrow-minded managerialism that dominates so much environmental effort. However, it does mean that little interest is given to the big questions, such as the implications of globalisation or the effects of neoliberal economics. Full-frontal politics is avoided, and the hard ecological issues kept in the background. The overall focus is pragmatic and humane, addressing the basic question of how environmental considerations can be employed to improve the quality of the individual experience and social life of cities.

Following the editor's introduction, the book contains 11 chapters, some by well-known authors such as Jeff Kenworthy, Elizabeth Burton/Katie Williams /Mike Jenks, and others less well-known to an English-speaking audience. The topics covered are: sustainable development, sustainability indicators, community design and empowerment, pollution and public health, nature conservation, urban intensification, crime prevention, automobile dependence, databases, households and infrastructures, and sustainable settlements for war-torn zones. The geographical scope of the book is as wide as the topics covered, with case studies stretching from Izhevsk to Chicago, Sheffield to Cape Town, and Rotterdam to Melbourne. This in itself is enriching, although the uniformity of focus often fails to capture the implications of such political and cultural diversity, and certainly the contradictions of cities in the developing world.

This reviewer particularly enjoyed the chapters by Hatfield Dodds on pathways and paradigms for sustainability, Geoff Green on the institutional politics of air pollution, and Hasic and Roberts on the possibilities of rebuilding sustainable settlements in former Yugoslavia. However, all the papers are clear, thoughtful, and informed pieces based on recent research. One or two may have since been republished in revised form, which in no way diminishes the overall value of this book.

It is unfortunate that the careful selection and organisation of the papers and the high quality of the contributions are let down by what appears to be a hasty piece of publishing: too many copy-editing errors and inconsistencies, the uneven quality of print, unnumbered chapters, and occasionally sloppy layout. Nonetheless, this volume can still be recommended as one of the better recent collections: consistent in its focus, clear and mature in its discussion of issues, and with more than sufficient technical material for researcher, student, and practitioner.

Peter Brand  
*School of Urban and Regional Planning,  
Universidad Nacional de Colombia*