

## BOOK REVIEWS

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**SOCIAL HOUSING: AN INTRODUCTION** by Stephen Harriott and Lesley Matthews. London: Addison-Wesley Longman, Ltd. 1998.

This is a basic textbook written in a thorough but plodding style reminiscent of the texts for the Open University. It certainly gives a good, if somewhat limited, overall view of the nuts and bolts of social housing in the U.K., especially for the uninitiated reader. It must be borne in mind that social housing in the U.K. is somewhat different from the European model, if one can generalize on the latter. The British model is an interesting mix of centralized intervention and self help provision in a liberal market. The impression one gets as a student of housing is one of a rather dynamic system (by this one means a system sensitive to the vagaries of Conservative versus Labour governments), and also one that is remarkably resilient especially in the face of the pluralistic trends of ethnic cultures stemming from various immigration waves. For several reasons the present text leads to some disappointment.

The text attempts to cover a large expanse of territory. While short chapters lead to a lack of depth in several areas, the authors try to make up for this in the large number of items covered in their exposition. This is perhaps in line with the target group to whom this book is addressed, new students of housing management. One is reminded of texts organized so as to facilitate cramming for an exam. The laconic pieces of text may be conducive towards rote learning but disappoint in their superficiality. The overall effect even for the generous reader is an inability to see the forest for the trees. Let us be specific.

Social housing is almost entirely treated as a commodity and the financing and market aspects are very well covered. However, the social impact of housing is sadly neglected. Not only is the key role of housing in social structuration ignored, some major texts in the field are not even included in the references, for example, Henderson and Karn (1987), Morris and Winn (1990), among others. This is a curious omission in view of the important contributions that British research has made to the field. The important aspects of housing vis-à-vis race, tenure classes, poverty and social exclusion etc. surely merit some mention even for a basic textbook. One looks in vain for some continuity with the pioneering texts of Pahl (1975), Rex and Moore (1967) and others of the managerial school.

The second comment concerns the role of the architect and the planner in the provision of housing. Here again these two agents have played considerably more significant roles in Britain compared to their European counterparts. In the book, the architect is given an optional role of 'consultant' (p. 101), while the planner is

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conspicuously absent from the arena of social housing. Again this gives a distorted picture even in the age of market supremacy. Surely their traditional initiatory roles in the development process have not dissolved into thin air? This is not the picture that one associates with housing in the U.K. This omission has the effect of obscuring the view of housing within a wider social and political context.

Finally, it should be noted that the authors do make an attempt to relate the provision of housing with the political regime, especially in the last chapter in which the probable impacts of the coming into power of the latest Labour government are explored. But here again the treatment is somewhat perfunctory. One wishes for a more reasoned exposition of how different regimes relate to the critical issue of housing. This could provide a valuable lesson for countries which have raised the privatization banner. We could learn from the 'beneficiaries' of Thatcherism.

In sum, this is a wide ranging but rather basic text. As an introductory textbook it is targeted to a rather narrow audience. As such it certainly covers the pertinent terrain and can be considered as perhaps adequate. For more in depth treatment of housing's social role one must look elsewhere.

#### REFERENCES

- Henderson, J. and Karn, V. (1987) *Race, Class and State Housing: Inequality and the Allocation of Public Housing in Britain*. Aldershot: Gower.
- Morris, J. and Winn, M. (1990) *Housing and Social Inequality*. London: Hilary Shipman.
- Pahl, R.E. (1975) *Whose City?* 2nd Edition, Hammondswoth: Penguin Books.
- Rex, J. and Moore, R. (1967) *Race, Community and Conflict: A Study of Sparkbrook*. London: Oxford University Press.

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#### **TROUBLES IN THE RAINFOREST: BRITISH COLUMBIA'S FOREST ECONOMY IN TRANSITION** by Trevor J. Barnes and Roger Hayter (eds.). Canadian Western Geographical Series, Vol. 33, 1997.

This volume is the product of a conference in a series of conferences across Canada in honor of the centenary of the birth of Harold A. Innis, Canada's famed economic historian. Books of conference papers are usually a disjointed fare. It is to the credit of the editors that this conference book reads like a comprehensive whole. Although the authors retain their own perspectives, the commonality of their overall topic provides for a unifying theme. Nevertheless, the chapters vary in their tone and some useful information has not been provided at all.

British Columbia's approach to development has been the 'staples' approach which Innis had so well identified "... harvesting timber transforms ecological capital into economic capital", writes C. S. Binkley in Chapter 2 of the volume. The province's