

*An Introduction to Rural Settlement Planning.* Paul J. Cloke, London: Methuen, 1983.

*Reviewed by: Jacob O. Maos*

Cloke's *Introduction to Rural Settlement Planning* deals with the diverse planning aspects of the contemporary British countryside that is representative of more developed European rural areas. The book's stage is the cultural, mature landscape that has undergone profound transformations in land use and settlement patterns. Despite its vernacular charm, this landscape is also wrought with problems such as poor social conditions, depopulation, decay of the traditional village, and urban encroachment.

These problems typically confront European planners; they are systematically treated in the book by review of a series of published plans. The author brings ample references to sources from scholarly texts, professional literature, and projects; such sources help provide a comprehensive overview of the rural planning process. Cloke explores the conceptual framework of rural planning, beginning with the definition and meaning of planning, identifying the agents that have prompted changes in the countryside, and analyzing the causes behind the social polarization and deprivation of the "socially invisible" rural population. In probing for solutions, the author compares theory to actual planning practices reflected by policies, legislation, and development plans. The establishment of structure-plan policies and an adequate framework for implementation are stressed as elements of particular importance. A good part of this material is based on local experience and may be difficult to assimilate by those not familiar with the British background. Many issues, nevertheless, prove to be of general interest. For example, the author dwells in detail on the problem of providing services for dispersed settlements; this problem has often led to a policy of concentrating resources into larger and better-equipped settlements to the detriment of the remote village. Cloke points out that policies are based almost entirely upon the existing distribution of settlements, rather than upon any ideas of introducing dynamic change into the settlement structure. He also notes that the theory of Central Places and other similar theories are often invoked to reinforce the "natural" service centre, and that the concepts of thresholds and ranges tend to be evaluated on the grounds of economic, rather than spatial or social, criteria.

Among other planning strategies the author discusses the village constellation concept. This idea is founded on the linking together of small

rural settlements, so that services and facilities can be shared on a communal basis. This concept was applied to advantage in the Israeli rural settlement programme, a significant fact which, unfortunately, is not commented upon in this work.

Cloke assesses the progress in British rural settlement planning in light of experience overseas; his discussion centers mainly on Europe, but also covers the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. The author draws interesting parallels between Soviet and British attempts to concentrate development in key settlements, designed to serve surrounding rural areas because of the liquidation of non-viable settlements. He takes issue with several evolved planning dogmas, including the preservation of the status quo, no-growth or minimal growth policies, and planned decline policies (which he brands as "negative" forms of rural planning).

In this reviewer's opinion, too little attention is devoted to the part of physical planning that deals with layout design, or the so-called outline structure. While diverse approaches are discussed, Cloke seems to warn against a myopic view of the layout question; such a view could obscure the need for a broader framework for planning and implementation.

The chapter on the role of designated areas explains the difficulty of reconciling criteria of conservation versus the upgrading of rural settlements. Still, such an exhaustive treatment as that provided by this book cannot relieve the complex task of predicting the consequences of alternative strategies in view of the diverse and often incompatible objectives involved.

Although the book has its origins in the teaching of rural geography and planning in Britain, it is much more than a textbook. Several conceptual questions are raised, including the degree to which physical planning should dominate or complement social planning and the concern over environmental rather than socioeconomic deprivation. Indications are that the development planning system is impotent to deal with the problem of social polarization, and that social, economic, and physical impacts on the countryside are repeatedly left to chance.

Cloke's book is a meritorious addition to the subject of rural settlement planning. Over and above that, this volume alerts the reader to the problem of social equity and the well-being of disadvantaged rural community groups. This message is valid for developed as well as developing countries, where the rural situation can be described as a major social ill.