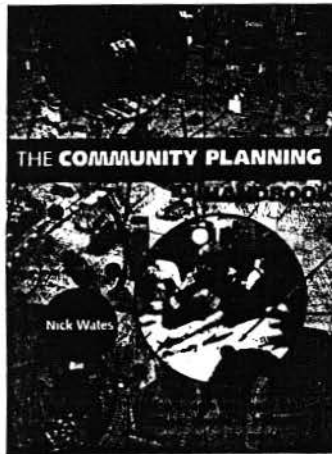


BOOK REVIEWS



The Community Planning Handbook
Nick Wates Earthscan 2000
 paperback £14.95

Thirty years ago, the idea and the practice of a community working collectively to make a plan for their area, often in opposition to a threatening proposal being imposed from above, was radical, subversive and exciting. People like Rod Hackney, Jim Monahan and Ralph Erskine, and the communities they worked with in Macclesfield, Covent Garden and Newcastle, broke new ground in the way they went about the task, often making up methods and techniques as they went along.

It is no longer quite so subversive, if at all. To have at least a component of community consultation, participation or self-help in an area planning process is now conventional wisdom, and it would be an unusual authority which did not write it into its programme. Whether the now-established repertoire of methods is widely understood, even when the ideology of participation is being sincerely promoted, is another matter. Terms like *Planning for Real* are frequently misused to convey all manner of things.

But grassroots planning is now orthodox, and Nick Wates book is an excellent and comprehensive catalogue of how to do it. A catalogue is what it is - it does not waste any time in propagandising or theorising, but just gets on with telling the reader how to select the methods that are appropriate for the task. The intended reader appears to be both the experienced design professional and the lay resident - a difficult trick

to pull off, which textbooks on democratising design rarely achieve, but this one does.

It is a very well-designed book, with the designer (Jeremy Brook) rightly being credited; clearly structured, with lots of colour coding, bar charts, explanatory drawings and photographs. The main section has an alphabetical survey of 53 methods for use in community planning. I would argue that some of these are events (e.g. Planning Weekend) and some are techniques (e.g. Mapping), and might have been better categorised as such. There is clearly an intention to make the book international in its scope, particularly with relation to third world contexts. The material is most sufficiently common for this to work, but not always; *Disaster management* sits uneasily on the page before *Environmental art project*. In addition, pricing event costs in dollars may perhaps be understandable in China, but will not be helpful in Castle Vale.

But these are small grumbles. This book deserves to sell widely, both to people involved in improving their local areas and to the professionals advising them, and I hope to come across lots of well-thumbed copies in libraries, community associations and architects offices.

Joe Holyoak