

The Community Planning Handbook:

How People Can Shape Their Cities, Towns and Villages

Nick Wates (ed.)
Earthscan, London, 2000
ISBN 1853836540 (paperback)
230 pp.
RRP \$42.85

All over the world there is an increasing demand for people's participation in the process of planning and managing their built environment. However, not many books on community planning and participation are written in a 'how to do it' style for a wide audience. *The Community Planning Handbook* is about how people can shape their cities, towns and villages in any part of the world. The material originated from three related programs: Tools for Community Design Program, Urban Design Group Public Participation Program, and Action Planning in Developing Countries Research Project. The evolution of the book itself has been a participatory process, even from the determination of the title!

The handbook is very easy to read and understand, due to its simple and concise language, clearly structured format and layout, alphabetical ordering, illustrations and communicative icons. The coloured drawings, graphics and photographs are well related to the text. The appendices contain useful formats and checklists, a glossary of terms and concepts with cross-referencing, a list of publications and films, and an annotated selection of contacts for further information and support. Lastly, Wates provides a section for feedback from readers. Further editions are planned, as well as translations and adaptations tailored to specific local contents (p. 221).

The book is divided into five main parts and all the material is presented in alphabetical order for easy reference. The introduction gives an overview of the importance of community planning and getting involved, and a concise explanation of the book's format. 'General principles A-Z' are mostly universal principles which apply to most situations in community planning. 'Methods A-Z' summarise a wide range of methods to assist people in getting involved in physical planning and design. 'Scenarios A-Z' show how the combined methods can form an overall strategy for a particular situation. Wates emphasises that this section is presented more as an inspiration than as a template, and that there are many other paths the reader could explore to achieve the same objectives. The timescales are over-optimistic because it is assumed that the process proceeds fairly smoothly.

The handbook is mostly based on the developed countries or on programs in developing countries which have secure funding and experienced

staff. It gives the impression that community planning is an easy task, but this may not be the case in many developing countries where democratisation and participation in planning is still undergoing change. The facilitator or moderator plays an important role in this process of enabling the community and deserves more emphasis on what he/she is expected to know and do. Although the editor explains that the scenarios should be used as inspirations, it would be more helpful if some were based on real projects that have worked in developing countries. Nevertheless, this book is a valuable stepping-stone in promoting democratic community participation in shaping the built environment.

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