BOOK REVIEW[1]

Katan, R., Shiffman, R. (2014). *Building together: Case studies in participatory planning and community building.* New York: New Village Press. ISBN: 9781613320167.

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In the U.S., advocacy planning had its beginnings during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. It emerged in response to the federal 'War on Poverty' advocated by President Lyndon Johnson as a much needed alternate approach to planning practice and was focused on addressing the displacement of low income communities by the federal urban renewal programs (Angotti, 2007). The earliest academic writing on the approach was the seminal article titled "A Choice Theory in Planning" by Paul Davidoff and Thomas Reiner that appeared in the 1962 volume of the AIP journal (APA 2000). As strong proponents of this participatory approach to planning, Roger Katan's and Ronald Shiffman's book *"Building Together"* explores the contexts and levels of problem solving and decision making it has lent itself to over the last four decades. The book is organized as a collection of case studies and makes an enriching read for today's practitioners of advocacy planning. The case studies spread from when it all began, the 1960s, to the 2000s. The cases provide firsthand experiences of authors who have actively engaged with community planning. The emphasis across the chapters is on adaptations of advocacy planning's elements and its consequent manifestations across the developed (i.e. Europe, North America) and developing world (i.e. South America and Africa). The discussion of cases which employed the advocacy approach at regional and neighborhood levels makes the book relevant to a new generation planners and policy makers who seek to understand the feasibility and opportunity that of advocacy and participatory approaches to planning.

Roger Katan introduces the book as an upgrade to his 1988 French publication, *Batir Ensemble*. Revised material from the 1988 manuscript includes updated longitudinal analysis of different participatory planning programs. His goal is to promote the social inclusivity of advocacy planning and present an overarching methodology derived from the chapter authors' many experiences in advocacy and participatory planning. In addition to revisions of Katan's earlier manuscript, Ronald Shiffman's contribution to the book includes new case study discussions (case studies two and five).

The book is presented in nine chapters, seven of which provide detailed accounts of participatory planning projects each author was directly involved with.

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The forewords by Done Ashton and Kenneth Reardon are well crafted testimonies to the richness of experience and expertise in advocacy planning that the authors bring together and the promise of collective wisdom that such a literary effort holds. The introductory chapter provides a lucid account of the authors' inspirations and concerns that steered them as young professionals and educators to the practice of advocacy planning. Case summaries in the introduction sufficiently explain their relevance. Having explained his perspectives on what planning practice ought to achieve and the role of "experts" in the process, Katan goes on to outline a common methodology that evolved over years of experience. However, he is careful to avoid reference to any case as completely complying to the prescribed methodology.

The case study presented in chapter two describes the experiences on two projects initiated by New York's Regional Planning Association, an independent urban research and advocacy organization. One project took place in the early 1970s and the other in the early 2000s. The comparison is an interesting example of regional participatory planning versus participatory planning at the city level. Chapter two elaborates the Williamsbury Community case where the initiative for change came from a multi-ethnic community. In this case study, community leaders and community organizations teamed up with professionals to revitalize a neighborhood which was falling apart. Four community planning projects in New York City are discussed in chapter three. These cases illustrate how entire communities organize and take charge of defining the quality of environments residents want to live in. The Ouagadougou case discussed in chapter four is a UN supported development project. The case is a good illustration of how the absence of hyper-centralized, techno-bureaucratic structures and sensitivity to indigenous social structures in policy design can improve community initiatives and motivate communities to innovative solutions. Though advocacy planning is often discussed with the agenda of benefits to disadvantaged, poor communities or populations, the case of the Jardies in Meudon described in chapter five presents a curious case of participatory planning in an affluent neighborhood of the developed world. The agents of change in this particular case were an influential group of professionals who chose to organize to maintain the high quality of life and the physical environment in their neighborhood.

Chapters six and seven shift the reader's focus to community planning projects in Columbia. Two categories of cases are discussed in this setting. The first illustrates how a group marginalized in the process of unchecked urbanization, self-initiated systems of material supply for their housing that made it more affordable and improved its quality. The case describes how a marginalized community transformed the lack of prescriptive government policy on housing into opportunity, transforming it to a win-win situation for both marginalized groups and the Columbian government. The other cases describe externally funded projects and how poor accountability and corruption in economically weak regions cripple participatory planning initiatives.

Some of the themes that are repeatedly emphasized across the case studies are: the need for strategies to ensure sustainable community participation and

social inclusivity, and the political and bureaucratic milieu most conducive to such an approach to planning. The conclusions in the final chapter suggest factors that may explain varied levels of success and determine relevance of advocacy and participatory planning in the developing and developed world.

While the chapters are for most part dedicated to elaborate descriptions of the projects and their contexts, leaving much of the project evaluation and analysis to the reader, the authors confine their interpretation and learning on these cases to the introductory and concluding chapters, and the chapter-wise learning sections of the book. Possible researcher biases in their interpretations of projects are acknowledged at the end of chapters. A sharing of what the author's learned, rather than prescriptive conclusions are attempted. Though the cases attempt to capture the practice of advocacy planning in different economic and socio-political contexts, and at different administrative levels, what they do most impressively and comprehensively is capture a range of "agents of change" that make organized community efforts possible.

Yet, there is room for greater integration of Shiffman's content to Katan's originally conceived presentation and design of the book. The design of chapter sections authored by Katan is illustrative of the general methodology prescribed in the introduction chapter, while Shiffman's chapters (Chapters three and six) do not seem to conform to such a design. Though both authors end their chapters with their insights, Katan's chapters provide a more thorough treatment of the challenges and opportunities that advocacy planning presents to practitioners. The conclusions in the final chapter could have been more strongly linked to Shiffman's case discussions.

References:

Angotti, Tom. 2007. *Advocacy and Community Planning: Past, Present and Future.* April 22.
American Planning Association. 2000. "Timeline of American Planning History." *http://www.planning.org/pathways/default.htm*