

economic) than rural areas, this chapter starts to lay the ground for a self-reflective moment by exploring how intolerance can also manifest as—or rather be nurtured by—indifference. As Beauregard posits:

one way in which intolerance is manifested is through ignoring a group that wishes to be publicly recognised; that is, by being actively indifferent to their presence and distinctiveness ... but this form of distancing from and avoidance of others—an attitude of ‘live and let live’—is not itself tolerance (pp. 134–5).

The argument is worth reflecting on for a moment, as it requires rethinking one’s own position relative to others who live in the same city, amid its contradictions. It implies, as Beauregard posits in chapter 6, that it is through the recognition and appreciation of the types of exclusion, inequalities, injustice and environmental degradation that urbanization engenders, but also of the potential for tolerance, environmentally sustainable, democratic and more just futures cities can offer, that we might start thinking about ‘the conditions under which we join the civic realm as political beings’ (p. 154). In this final chapter, the moral agenda of this book is more clearly articulated in relation to citizens’ responsibilities towards others which ‘extend beyond the obligation to treat other people with civility as we go about our daily tasks’ (p. 168). At first sight such a statement seems like a rather naïve call to action, which in many ways ignores structural inequalities of access and unevenly distributed means of (political) action between different urban citizens. However, it rapidly becomes clear that the main audience Beauregard is targeting is the very same one that has constantly been celebrating the city and its apparent progressiveness: an audience which, when it identifies urban contradictions, prefers ‘indifference and withdrawal’ to individual, collective and political action (p. 161). To most critical urban scholars, and to deprived and excluded urban citizens probably even more so, the diagnosis offered in this book will come as no surprise. Nevertheless, it comes at a time where hyperbolic discourses on the urban age are almost uncritically taken up by a class of ruling experts, indifferent urban elites, savvy local politicians and corporate powers that contribute, through their actions, to nurturing those contradictions under the veil of progress. As a result, if resituated in broader questions of democratic engagement and political struggles, seeing cities as inherently contradictory—and recognizing the dialectical nature of those contradictions—is valuable. In that sense, this piece of work can (hopefully) act as a wake-up call for privileged urbanites to recognize that cities can be good but are also—and historically have predominantly been—fundamentally and inevitably bad, especially for the voiceless and less wealthy, and that in this context ‘doing no harm’ (or, I should say, ‘assuming one does no harm’) ‘is only just the beginning’ (p. 163).

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Willem Salet 2018: *Public Norms and Aspirations: The Turn to Institutions in Action*. New York and London: Routledge–RTPI Library Series

In the post-political age, norms and principles have lost their public appeal: they are almost universally perceived as constraints to individual initiative and social innovation. *Public Norms and Aspirations* by Willem Salet goes against this tide, seeking to re-establish a platform for planners from which they might assess ongoing practices and fluctuating urban agendas, allowing them to act unconditioned by the pressure of performance and deliverables. With a deep understanding of planning and governance developed in his longstanding career as an engaged scholar, Salet draws upon various literatures—philosophy, sociology, juridical studies, political science—to improve planning research methodology, deploying an institutionalist perspective grounded in

the pragmatics of urban development and governance. In six chapters, he crafts an original and challenging discussion weaving together two distinct intellectual traditions—institutionalism and pragmatism—to understand how institutions shape and legitimize planning action, and provide it with aspiration and purpose. Examples from Dutch planning contribute to such an understanding with practical focus and critical insight.

By merging institutionalism and pragmatism, Salet foregrounds a moral zone between ‘the rule of law’ and ‘the rule of men’, between public action framed by the state and public action in actual political dialectics, where institutions in action can be discussed and questioned. At stake is the capacity of planning to achieve collective aspirations in a complex and ever-changing urban world, and yet be legitimized as public action by transcending contingent objectives and problems through public dialogue on the meaning of institutions and norms. Such legitimacy is of the utmost importance in resisting the erosion of a public sphere where interests and differences should be worked out through deliberation and critical engagement.

Public Norms provides an articulated theoretical framework that thoroughly explores the strictures and difficulties of merging two different systems of thought. Salet discusses how these two traditions understand the public interest and how they tackle the question of how a public comes into being—one by means of institutions, the other by means of practical engagement. In doing so, he offers no shortcuts for an operation that is necessarily as challenging as it is controversial. The result is an ambitious book, as well as a debatable attempt to combine ‘the dialectic of the practical and the institutional judgment’ (p. 63) in planning and inject a fair dose of political legitimacy and social accountability into a field that has virtually petered out in the wake of evaporating institutions (the case of Dutch planning law, at the beginning of the book, is very eloquent in this sense). In this perspective, *Public Norms* is a well-organized provocation to discuss how planners can engage with practicalities in a fragmented and conflicting urban world, and yet legitimize public action by resorting to public norms and institutions.

The effort to provide a well-crafted theoretical argument for navigating through different traditions and literatures regarding norms, however, leaves things to one side. For example, the city is a shadow in Salet’s construction, evoked as a background but hardly engaged as a historical, vibrant and controversial form of socio-materiality. The author frames the discussion in a theoretical planning perspective that hardly speaks of the concrete demand for institutions coming from neighborhoods, communities and regions, where formal institutions coexist and wrestle with informal institutions embedded in cultures, habits and entrenched inequalities.

The institutions argument is discussed in its general form and mostly refers to formal norms and rules addressing planning practice, only partially acknowledging the more complex normative environment where institutions of different sorts arise and compete to address social behaviors in urban space. Planning examples mostly focus on normative and political arrangements, and do not engage directly with conflicts and power struggles shaping places and communities where people often feel abandoned by institutions and are left with a post-political attitude. These are the places, I believe, where the demand for institutions is rising nowadays and planning practice can be critically tested.

Other than that, the big challenge highlighted by this book is how planners can concretely play an institutional role, respecting norms and regulations, while dealing effectively with the messiness of urban life that constantly draws their attention back to heterogeneity, exceptions and conflicts. And although Salet’s phraseology is often laborious and sometimes amplifies the feeling that this is a text for ‘authorized personnel’, the book still aspires to speak to many currently engaged with similar problems who can greatly benefit from his work.

I trust that Salet's argument, given all its relevance and generous articulation, will contribute to a broader conversation among planners and urban scholars. Standing at a frontier where we look back at the institutional constituencies of the welfare state and ahead towards post-truths and evaporating institutions, the book invites those of us who are differently engaged with planning better places to explore the many trails that institutional thinking opens up in front of us, in the different contexts where we operate as scholars and practitioners. Here we see institutions in action.

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Andrea Fischer-Tahir and Sophie Wagenhofer (eds.) 2017: *Disciplinary Spaces: Spatial Control, Forced Assimilation and Narratives of Progress since the 19th Century*. Bielefeld: Transcript

This is a wide-ranging collection of essays that covers broad swathes of time and space within a single volume. Its strength lies in that diversity, as it brings together Central Asian, North, South and Central American, European, East African, Middle Eastern and Australasian examples spanning more than three centuries. This may also be its weakness: none of the contributions is particularly original; much space is expended on explaining a number of basic premises that each writer felt may not be self-evident to outsiders to each respective field; and a general reader with some academic experience should be largely unsurprised by the findings. Some of the more contemporary examples might be useful a few years hence, when a new readership, unfamiliar with these events as participant-observers and/or critical readers of news, will find something of value in the statements provided herein. If, however, this kind of book is to be useful to a general and potentially non-academic readership, the conventions of turgid prose that academics and academic translators find essential to their mode of expression might well need to yield to good sense and communication skills.

The refreshingly direct premise of the book, which is a critique of statist control across the world, draws upon two insights developed by James C. Scott in *Seeing Like a State* (1998). The first of these is that states are inherently afraid of unsettled people, and that they consequently do their utmost to control their movements and/or sedentarize their populations. The second Scottism is that of the vanities and failures of development as a statist project. It might have been worth following Scott further into the present century, to his concern with non-state forms of political organization in South and Southeast Asia in *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009), which would have indicated the risks of romanticization that such an undertaking runs: under what political and material conditions can one hope to escape the modern state?

A number of other premises and juxtapositions that appear in the book are inadequately explained: 'othering' is a word that ought to have died in the 1990s, and one would have hoped for a closer discussion of how 'othering' and 'forced assimilation' work together or against each other. 'Modernity' makes an appearance in the cast of (abstract) characters, but fails to develop into an adequate analytical tool. 'Progress' is not glossed either (are we to believe that all ideas of progress come from statist vanity?); one tantalizing reference to the 'primitive accumulation of capital' is left dangling. Naming a theme is of course not to be confused with actually addressing it; and if we are to engage with Norbert Elias, Michael Mann or anyone else on ethnic cleansing, genocide and 'the' Holocaust, we might also want to discuss Giorgio Agamben on the potential of states to be(come) concentration camps (*Homo Sacer*, 1995; *State of Exception*, 2003).

It is worth noting that neither of the editors, whose earlier, original and exciting work this reviewer is familiar with, felt it worthwhile to make their own contributions