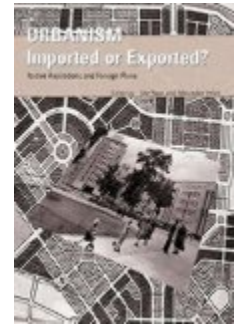


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Joe Nasr, Mercedes Volait, eds. *Urbanism: Imported or Exported? Native Aspirations and Foreign Plans*. West Sussex, England: Wiley-Academy, 2003. 392 pp. \$65.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-470-85160-9.

Reviewed by Gergely Baics (Department of History, Northwestern University and Min Kyung Lee, Department of Art History, Northwestern University)
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Urban Planning for Whom? *Urbanism: Imported or Exported* makes a noteworthy contribution to the broad field of trans-national planning history.[1] The collected volume grew out of a 1998 seminar with thirty-some participants. Five of the papers were published in the journal *City and Society* in 2000.[2] This collection contains most of the other papers from the seminar, accompanied by three later additions, included to broaden the otherwise largely Mediterranean scope of the papers.

The introduction by co-editors Joe Nasr and Mercedes Volait, followed by Anthony King's remarks on the writing of transnational planning history, offers an insightful reappraisal of the field of planning history, and sets forth an innovative theoretical and methodological framework to reexamine the diffusion of planning models. The reexamination stems from Stephen Ward's typology of diffusion, cited throughout the papers in the volume.[3] Ward identifies six ideal types of diffusion—synthetic borrowing, selective borrowing, and undiluted borrowing; and negotiated imposition, contested imposition, and authoritarian imposition—based on the power relations between exporting and importing countries. Structures of diffusion, he argues, determine the degree of freedom with which agents, foreign or indigenous, apply external planning models to shape the local urban environment.

Nasr and Volait develop this last, most insightful, element of Ward's analysis: the question of local mediations. Borrowing from King, they ask: "how, in a variety of political conditions, does a local, indigenous population respond to, modify, control, or domesticate the urban development strategies of an external authority or power, be it a colonial state, a powerful com-

mercial interest, or simply, a firm of planning consultants" (quoted, p. xv)? The focus on local mediations promises four major revisions to the field. First, as King underlines, this approach avoids the inherent traps of macro-theorizing. Identifying the multiple agencies involved in diffusion places the question of power relations at the center of the analysis without allowing theories like world-systems, dependency, post-colonial theory, or globalization to dominate the interpretation. Second, instead of relying on essentializing categories such as the colonial, Arab, or Mediterranean city, the multi-layered and fragmented nature of the individual cities are brought into sharper focus.

Moreover, by highlighting local mediations, the editors stress the intricacies of spatial, political, and social negotiations present whenever external planning models are mobilized for local purposes. Their model embraces a more nuanced interpretation of diffusion than the binaries of local vs. foreign, center vs. periphery, exogenous vs. endogenous allow. Finally, concentrating on structures and agents of diffusion opens up a feasible research strategy centered on the historical study of specific city-buildings based on sources in both metropolitan and local archives. This demands a wider range of skills from the researcher, including fluency in multiple languages, and familiarity with the workings of many, often less well-ordered, archives.

Overall, the introduction presents a powerful and important challenge to all historians of urban planning. The central question is how to construct a critical history of transnational urban planning. Each of the essays in the volume can be read as an exploration of this challenge.

In what follows, we give a brief overview of the content of each paper, and examine how successfully they match the book's ambitious agenda.

The papers are organized into four sections, each containing three essays. Part 1 is vaguely titled "The Latest Models." In her analysis of the modernization of Cairo between 1870 and 1950, from pre- to post-colonial rule, Volait makes the case for continuity in the importation of European, in particular French, models. She rejects the notion that British colonial domination inevitably affected Cairo's planning. Carole Hein examines how in early twentieth-century Japan, planners borrowed selectively from the West to modernize Japanese cities, while in Taiwan and Korea, they imposed those European models authoritatively. From this, she arrives at the debatable conclusion that Japanese colonial planning and architecture should be seen as Western in form. We take issue with this interpretation for the Taiwanese and Koreans surely regarded and continue to regard the interventions as Japanese in origin, which explains why in Seoul, as Hein points out, all built structures of the occupation have been torn down, moved, or abandoned. Lastly, Ward addresses the often neglected issue of how American planning traveled across the Atlantic. He claims that between the 1930s and 1950s, American concepts, such as regional planning, the neighborhood unit, or planning for mass consumer society, were incorporated via synthetic borrowing to the planning of European cities.

Part 2 centers on "City-building, State-building, and Nation-building." First, Alexandra Yerolympou examines the conceptual and spatial contradictions of Thessaloniki's 1917 replanning. Through this case study, she underlines how self-imposed, Western-style urbanism translated into social engineering in the Balkans. Roland W. Strobel traces changes in architectural style during the postwar reconstruction of East Berlin to illustrate how, under Stalinist rule, German architecture in the East forsook modernism for socialist realism. Lastly, Alaa El-Habashi looks at the controversy associated with the 1926 competition of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe for the reconstruction of Cairo's Mosque of 'Amr ibn al-'As. Through an intensive analysis of this single case, he reconstructs competing interpretations of Egyptian cultural heritage, and looks at the conflicted identities of native and foreign experts.

In part 3, "Powerful Subjects," the focus shifts to local mediations. Nora Lafi examines Tripoli's modernization during the energetic administration of 'Alî Ridha in the 1870s. Interestingly, European planning models arrived

in Tripoli via the meditation of the Tanzîm? t Ottoman Empire. May Davie's analysis of Beirut's Étoile area, built in the 1920s and 1930s under the city's French mandate, offers a rich analysis of the complex power relations that gave rise to this emblematic project. Similarly, Joe Nasr contributes a nuanced study of the postwar reconstruction of the French cities of Blois and Beauvais. He skillfully shows how local experts molded national prerogatives into long-delayed local planning priorities. These essays produced the strongest section in their overall adherence to the question of who controlled the generation of urban space and of how that control was subverted and shifted among different historical agents.

Alicia Novick's study of French planners, including Joseph-Antoine Bouvard, Jean-Claude Forestier, Léon Jaussély, Werner Hegemann, and Le Corbusier, who produced plans to reorganize early twentieth-century Buenos Aires, however, still focuses on the experts themselves as opposed to the local mediations of their work. Eric Verdeil is more successful in teasing out the reception of two foreign plans—the Institute for Research and Education Oriented toward Development report and Michel Ecochard's master plan—aimed at transforming Beirut during the Chehab administration (1958-1966). He finds that Lebanese experts incorporated Ecochard's plans, for he took a functionalist approach, and made concessions to local priorities. Lastly, Ray Bromley reconstructs the career of Greek theorist and planner Constantinos Doxiadis (1913-1975). While Doxiadis's biography and his science of ekistics are interesting, it remains unclear how such a conventional approach furthers the study of local mediations.

All of the essays address the spatial manifestations of local mediations in city planning. As Nasr and Volait explain in the introduction, "local" is pluralized to acknowledge the complexity of the term's referents, including motivations, actions, individual experts and planning groups. Yet, the authors' use of "locals" rarely seems to include the inhabitants who were most affected by the imaginations and constructions of urban planning. For whom and for what uses are cities built and transformed? How does the shaping of urban space define the social? Research from this starting point might consider not only the agency of experts and professionals, but also the agency of the urban inhabitants through use and misuse.

The focus on local mediations, on the other hand, does succeed in avoiding the traps of macro-theorization. All authors carefully situate their studies within the his-

torical context, and support their points with precise archival research, using multiple languages, and drawing on rarely accessed local material. Many readers will rightfully find the specificity and richness of detail to be the volume's greatest asset. Yet, empirically solid research ought to enhance creative interpretation. The lack of engagement with urban or social theory in the individual essays at times hinders the impact of the editors' far-reaching conclusions.

One of the strongest points of the volume, as the overview asserts, is its broad geographical sweep. It offers a stimulating tour-de-force in modern transnational planning history. As it is often the case with collected volumes, though, *Urbanism Imported or Exported* lacks cohesion. The sections are arranged in a rather ad hoc fashion, while the pieces do not really communicate with each other. One learns illuminating details about the diffusion process in individual cities, but a critical revision of transnational planning history is yet to come.

No doubt, to rewrite planning history is a daunting task, and the problematization of the diffusion process and the study of local meditations are valuable steps in this direction. This volume takes on a series of important historical translations of urban planning models. How-

ever, planning history must be concerned not only with the making of the urban environment but also with those who live in the city, and must be understood as a critical method of the planning practice. The organizing question for a critical revision must be "the city for whom?"

Notes

[1]. Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power, and Environment* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1976); Gordon Emanuel Cherry, *Shaping an Urban World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980); Anthony Sutcliffe, *Towards the Planned City: Germany, Britain, the United States, and France, 1780-1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981); Ian Masser, and R. H. Williams, *Learning from Other Countries: The Cross-National Dimension in Urban Policy-Making* (Norwich: Geo, 1986); Robert Freestone, *Urban Planning in a Changing World: The Twentieth Century Experience* (London, New York: E&FN Spon; Routledge, 2000).

[2]. Sharon Nagy, ed. *City and Society* 12:1 (2000).

[3]. Stephen V. Ward, "Re-examining the International Diffusion of Planning," in Robert Freestone ed., *Urban Planning in a Changing World: The Twentieth-Century Experience* (London: E & FN Spon, 2000), 40-60.

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