City of Well-being: A Radical Guide to Planning, by Hugh Barton, London, UK and New York, USA, Routledge, 2017, 290 pp., £100.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-63932-3

If I were asked to state, in one sentence, the primary message of Barton's latest book, *City of Well-being*, I would then write: 'peoples' health and community well-being must be the primary priorities for urban planners and place managers'. Hugh Barton, Emeritus Professor of planning, health and sustainability at the University of the West of England (UK), has produced an engaging, progressive and practice-oriented written account, rich in human interest, of how to put people at the heart of spatial planning at the city, town and neighbourhood level. The book arrives in uncertain times (or, to use Barton's word, amidst a series of 'time-bombs') for people, places and the urban habitat. Urbanization, climate change, extreme weather events, air pollution, water and food insecurity, biodiversity loss and land degradation have been increasing in terms of frequency and impact. Furthermore, an ever-growing overweight population associated with unhealthy lifestyles has become a pervasive and systemic phenomenon. The impact of such events goes beyond physical devastation, economic collapse or societal deprivations, as they also have negative consequences on humans' health and well-being.

The book is far more than a compilation of ideas or approaches on how planning should be done. It is an account of Barton's life experiences as a planning scholar who truly has a clear idea of what the purpose of the planning discipline should be, and I agree with the author in this quest. Spatial planning should be grounded in an understanding of the real problems of cities and towns. It should be informed by a deep knowledge of history and the precursors of the science and art of planning; and, above all, it should remain focused on improving peoples' lives. Therefore, drawing on ancient theorist such as Marcus Vitruvius Pollio (80–70 BC) and Hippodamus of Miletus (498–408 BC), the latter of whom is recognized as the founding father of urban planning, and on theories of human ecology, Barton's ultimate goal is to 'convince' planners to practice their craft ethically and honestly, to perceive spatial planning as an inclusive and integrating activity aimed at the health and well-being of everyone, irrespective of their status, and to enhance the quality and resilience of the human habitat. In addition, the Settlement Health Map that has become internationally recognized in the public health field, especially amongst the World Health Organization (WHO) Healthy Cities Network, is employed throughout the book as an analytical framework. The health map is composed of eight spheres, including lifestyle, the local economy and the built and natural environment, and positions people at the heart of the framework. It provides a rationale for policy synthesis in relation to climate change, local environments, healthy lifestyles, community equity and development, job creation, accessibility to facilities and safe, attractive cityscapes. I found the use of the Settlement Health Map very useful in understanding that spatial policies, planning intentions and projects are altogether strongly related to health and well-being (Chapter 2).

The book provides positive and negative case studies to illustrate the interrelationships between spatial planning, the environment and physiological issues, such as obesity due to, among other factors, the lack of pedestrian or cycling infrastructures. Barton's calls the positive cases 'beacons of hope', i.e., cases illustrating best practices for the planning and governance of cities and towns. In general, the cases of Copenhagen (Denmark), a founding member of the WHO Healthy Cities Network, Kuopio (Finland), Freiburg (Germany) and Portland, Oregon (USA) are given as context-specific examples in which planning decisions are oriented towards health, well-being and a sustainable quality of life for all city dwellers. Specifically, the cycling and pedestrian structures of Copenhagen, supported by a consolidated planning practice, greatly contribute to both air quality and a healthy lifestyle. The author identifies as pioneering the three urban fabrics of Kuopio: (1) the walking city fabric; (2) the transit city fabric; and (3) the car city fabric. The aim of these three fabrics, initially developed by Leo Kosonen, the former chief architect-planner, is to promote the recognition and regeneration of different kinds of urban habitats. The author explains Freiburg's current planning success as being the result of long-term strategic thinking, along with strong working ties between politicians and planners and the establishment of partnerships with the university, businesses and civil society. For example, by working jointly, these actors were able to implement some structural changes in

Freiburg, including shifts from traditional industry to innovative enterprises and from a car-oriented to a public transport-, cycling- and walking-based city. These spatial planning interventions, associated with urban renewal and urban extension schemes, have helped to improve living conditions and have helped to position Freiburg as a successful case in terms of the linkage between planning and nature. Portland is also identified as a 'beacon of hope' because city authorities have used health and well-being as a motive for breaking out of the traditionally car-oriented planning regime dominant in the United States.

The manner in which planning is done in these cities paves the way for the debate throughout the book concerning the aims of spatial planning, the usefulness of sustainable development discourse and the purpose of planning in a pluralistic society. Barton claims that in a pluralistic society, in order to be effective and impactful spatial planning must be conducted based on mutual engagement and co-operation, and cannot be based on centralized decision-making or unrealistic market decisions. I concur with Barton's thoughts on the role of planning in a pluralistic society and with his strong message that 'urban planning is not about favouring one group of the population over another, but attempting to create places that can accommodate and provide for all the different needs that people have' (114). Furthermore, I also share Barton's belief that local levels of governance must have sufficient autonomy to tailor their own future strategies and align them with their specific social, economic and environmental realities.

The book is a fascinating collection of theoretical approaches and empirical cases, and definitely provides 'food for thought' on how to plan and design better cities and towns in which citizens can access walking and cycling paths, leisure areas, playgrounds and pop-up cultural areas, which ultimately would allow them to enjoy healthy and prosperous lives. Based on my academic encounters with planning practitioners, however, I feel that spatial planning in reality is far more complex, because spatial governance arrangements, power relations and funding mechanisms have become paramount in supporting plan-implementation processes.

Barton demonstrates awareness that the laws of the market and the influence of private interests are powerful forces in current spatial planning practice, and could eventually impact healthy cities. To counteract this, the book ends with seven sharp conclusions intended to demonstrate to planning professionals that the evidence on how to promote healthy urban environments for all is out there, and that they must learn from both the good and the less positive examples. The book, in addition, has features that make it truly attractive for a wider readership. For example, I found the 'further reading' section at the end of each chapter particularly appealing. Certainly, Barton's literature suggestions would be very helpful in guiding planners towards meaningful and responsible planning. Moreover, the textual highlights and the illustrations together make the author's intended message a persuasive one.

I would not hesitate to recommend this book as a 'must have' to anyone who is interested in spatial planning, including planning scholars, environmental scientists, place managers and policy-makers. It is a timely book that provides useful insights into how planning should be grounded in an understanding of reality that is informed by history and best practices with the aim of improving the lives of all.

Notes on contributor

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