

Review

Peter S. Brandon & Patrizia Lombardi

Evaluating Sustainable Development in the Built Environment

Blackwell, Oxford, 2005

The concept of sustainable development is very much 'en vogue' in the past ten to fifteen years and has generated an avalanche of literature. Many contributions on sustainable development however, are rather vague in nature and less well focused. This new book on evaluating sustainable development in the built environment written by Brandon and Lombardi (BL) is a notable exception. It is an intellectual pleasure to read this book, as it combines a strong and original methodological approach with interesting case studies from different countries.

BL argue rightly that the evaluation of sustainable development calls for the use of appropriate evaluation tools that find their offspring in a solid methodological foundation. They start their study with an operational description of the concept of sustainable development in relation to the built environment and urban planning. The assessment of sustainability is instigated by action-driven strategies of policy-makers and planners and should provide the corner stones for public intervention.

Next, BL offer a useful typology of sustainability indicators and describe the wider context of sustainable development, e.g., in relation to the ecological footprint concept. They rightly position sustainable development in the perspective of future opportunities for urban quality of life.

A very interesting contribution is offered in the chapter on a new framework for evaluating sustainable development. BL adopt an holistic approach and resort to the fundamental and sometimes neglected scholarly work of the Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd. He has designed a philosophical cosmonomic basis for understanding our complex dynamic reality by making a distinction into 15 modalities that may be seen as irreducible aspects or dimensions that altogether make up an holistic pattern or image of reality. It is absolutely a major merit of the authors that they have uncovered the extremely useful cosmonomic philosophy of Dooyeweerd and deployed it as the basis for both understanding complex trade-offs in sustainability and coping with the multidimensionality of evaluating new possibilities for future sustainability in the built environment.

The cosmonomic approach is next used as a framework for presenting various case studies, such as municipal waste treatment systems, urban regeneration projects and social reporting on strategic urban plans. Various assessment methods are systematically described and their use (including process protocols) is highlighted. The book concludes with future issues, a description of the cosmonomic idea of reality and a listing of EU structural indicators for assessing sustainability.

This book forms no doubt an unconventional contribution to sustainable development planning. It offers many new perspectives, is well written, and may be seen as a welcome

addition to the literature on sustainable urban planning. Despite the complexity of the philosophical issues involved, it is written in a clear and pedagogical style, so that it is an attractive book for both students and researchers.

Of course, a book of this nature calls for new research endeavours. I mention three topics here which might deserve future attention of the authors.

In the first place, sustainable development has a clear time dimension, as rightly argued by BL. But it would require more thorough analysis to combine time-varying interests in sustainable development with the dynamics of modalities incorporated in the Dooyeweerdian cosmonomic philosophy.

Another issue that calls increasingly more interest from urban planners is the space-time dependency of various sustainability indicators. In the context, there would be a great new scope for combining spatial-temporal autocorrelation with proper urban sustainability indicators, e.g., through the use of GIS.

And finally, it would be a major contribution if different case studies on urban sustainable development would be mutually compared, inter alia by deploying solid statistical techniques from meta-analysis. This would certainly bring to light new insights on commonalities and contrasts in the assessment of sustainable development.

In conclusion, the present book is thought provoking and may be seen as a landmark in the theory on sustainable urban development planning.

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