
BOOK REVIEWS

Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta & Hannah Appel (eds), 2018. *The Promise of Infrastructure*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

The contemporary context of the Anthropocene has evoked re-conceptualisation of concepts and categories inviting comprehensive, in-depth and multi-layered understandings of their multiple meanings and associated functions. The application of a transdisciplinary lens to explore concepts through undisciplined or de-disciplinary initiatives is gaining ground during recent times to arrive at plural perspectives by addressing intersections and inseparable overlaps between the physical (technical) and the social. There is an overarching awareness that studying and perceiving so-called physical objects like water (H₂O), air (O₂), etc. only as ‘technical’ separates them from larger social, cultural and political contexts. This awareness can be considered as an outcome of cross-disciplinary and multi-sectoral knowledge exchanges, an imperative for our survival and sustenance within the era of global environmental change.

The mutual, cyclical and reciprocal relationships between infrastructures and environment during the entire life span (or life cycle) of the former, proceeding through various stages of design, financing, construction, completion, maintenance, repair, breakdown, obsolescence and ruin (being permanently dead or getting restored, enabling the sequence altogether again) is provocative enough to shed light on multiple meanings and exigencies that infrastructures encompass. And this is why this edited volume, consisting of nine chapters structured along three major interventions — time, politics, promise —

can be considered as the timeliest contribution. That infrastructures are ‘sociotechnical’ assemblages have been empirically and ethnographically validated across various chapters in this book. The volume advances and enriches the anthropological understanding and probing of infrastructures as ‘objects of ethnographic engagement’ (4), facilitating new theoretical and political insights for and from anthropology. The volume builds upon an array of genealogies: critical Marxist perspectives, the government of difference in cities, and the science, technology and society (STS) literature. The volume is a comprehensive coverage of infrastructures from multi-layered, multi-dimensional and multi-modal perspectives across complex functioning of multiple actors, traversing both human and non-human worlds and worldviews.

Unravelling multiplicities from hard infrastructures (Schwenkel, Chapter 4; Anand, Chapter 6) to ‘infrastructure’s infrastructures’ to ‘people as infrastructures’ and ‘structures of feeling’ to ‘knowledge infrastructures’ (Bowker, Chapter 8), this volume addresses convergences along politics, poetics and promises of infrastructures. With the conviction that ‘[...] any given future is built on the past’ (7), the editors boldly assert that infrastructures mediate time as it mediates space. The temporal interplay between spatial and social extension is manifested in von Schnitzler’s chapter (5) on metered water and electricity in South Africa. The coproduction of the temporal, spatial and political finds reflection in Anand’s chapter (6) on hydraulic politics and bureaucracy in Mumbai which traces how the spatial extension of pipes potentially supplying drinking water to non-authorised settlements is determined by a

politico-temporal trajectory dotted with elaborate negotiations and bargains among multiple stakeholders and actors (slums dwellers, politicians, engineers, managers, etc.) over an extended period of time. Gupta concretises the significance of understanding and exploring infrastructures as spatio-temporal projects, ‘chronotypes’ when he describes infrastructures not as finished products but frames and familiarises ‘infrastructures as unfolding’ over many moments with uneven temporalities (Chapter 2). The editors validate why and how they have considered and contemplated on ‘time’ as one of the most significant interventions to explore infrastructures: ‘A focus on the temporal helps us think of the spatial, technical, material, logistical, political and social properties of infrastructures together’ (19).

The element of ‘promise’ elaborately fleshed out in the different chapters connects infrastructural past, present and posterity, enabling readers to dig deep, making meanings even from ‘hidden temporalities’ entrenched in future oriented investments or ‘the ruins of the future’. Gupta’s rereading of ruins of half-built infrastructure projects in Bangalore encapsulates ruination not as the fall of past glory but an in-between stage with the hopes of modernity and progress embodied in the construction phase at one end of the spectrum and suspension of those hopes in discontinued projects on the other (Chapter 2). That this ‘promise’ also embodies statist legitimisation, oppression and desperation comes out sharply in the chapters contributed by Schwenkel and Larkin (Chapters 4 and 7). Schwenkel demonstrates how risks of natural calamities and political subjugation were ingrained in laudable promises of technological prosperity relating to

smokestacks in post-colonial Vietnam. The opening chapter by Appel complicates ‘promise’ by unfurling multi-scalar and multi-dimensional insights reflecting on today’s imperial formations and the poisoned promise of economic growth. Drawing attention to ‘Investment as a percentage of GDP’ as the statistical reflection of infrastructural projects in the national economy, Appel writes about the lived experience of spectacular rates of infrastructural investment in Equatorial Guinea noting its centrality to ideas of national economy and schemes of economic growth (Chapter 1: 42). Harvey on the other hand unveils the element of ‘longing’ and expectations surrounding promises of road construction projects in Peru (Chapter 3).

The last two chapters by Bowker and Boyer emphasise not only why infrastructures but ‘why now’, explaining how and why fresh theoretical formulations and empirical insights building upon the existing archaeology of knowledge is imminent within Anthropocene. For Bowker the more important question than ‘what is an infrastructure?’ is ‘when is an infrastructure?’ (Chapter 8: 203). Shedding light on ‘knowledge infrastructures’, Bowker uses the term ‘infrastructures’ to connect across an array of literature. Pointing out to the limits of knowledge classification, he establishes why interdisciplinarity and trans-disciplinarity are crucial to explore infrastructures, given its layered nature and complexities across time and space, human collectivities and also data, representing challenges for the ‘design, use and maintenance of robust infrastructures’ (Chapter 8: 217). This chapter also introduces readers to species database like the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, discusses its limitations like providing and generating

linear and single observations, being restricted to politically selected parts of the globe, and validates why environmental (more specifically climate) knowledge infrastructures should be perceived, designed and made operational across pluralistic prisms and perspectives.

Referring to his 2014 work, Boyer affirms that the anthropological revelations of infrastructures are part of a much larger movement: the 'anti-anthropocentric turn' in human sciences (Chapter 9: 225). The chapter intensely draws from what Boyer calls 'a family resemblance' rooted in the critical social science literature emanated from cutting-edge researches by Michel Foucault, Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour and Cary Wolfe. Criticizing the classical, Keynesian, neoclassical and neo-Keynesian models of economic growth indebted to apparatuses of carbon energy extraction and delivery, Boyer advocates that a 'revolutionary infrastructure' (through the adoption of the Marxian path) is critically relevant for facing and overcoming the Anthropocene. His idea is to move beyond 'the familiar infrastructures of carbon modernity that currently encompass and enable us' (Chapter 9: 231).

The co-evolution and co-functioning of hard, soft and ecological infrastructures where nature and culture are embedded as enmeshed entities across spatio-temporal scales finds reflection in the various contributions in this volume. The Anthropocene as the immediate and urgent context to determine and decide upon desired infrastructures has been well formulated in the last two chapters by Bowker and Boyer. Yet, the connect requires deeper consolidation through the use of robust datasets and more empirical examples, a provocative provision rolled out by this volume as future lines of

inquiries that can be taken up by social science researchers. This conviction is channelled through Anand, Gupta and Appel's comment: 'We present a set of scholars working on infrastructure today, but we also gesture to all the work still to be done' (7).

This book is a must read for students and scholars pursuing STS, political ecology and development studies. The policy makers can be immensely benefited from it as the ideas, concepts and contexts laid out in the introduction and subsequent chapters have revolutionary potentials to enrich and expand their perceptions and mindsets. The only challenge is that the sophisticated scholarly presentations might not attract bureaucrats and technocrats directly; a concern that is not specifically targeted to this volume, but for series of extremely significant recent social sciences contributions, pressing forward the need to come up with innovative mechanisms (even within academic writing) through which academic and policy dialogues and exchanges can be effectively crafted.

Jenia Mukherjee

Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur
jenia@hss.iitkgp.ernet.in

Richard Florida, 2018. *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Falling the Middle Class and What We can Do About It*. New York: Basic Books.

The title of the book by Florida tells us what the new urban crisis refers to and also shows promises for solutions. Cities have increased inequality and deepened segregation, and the result is the disappearance of the middle class. Starting from his observations about US cities from his childhood, Florida expands the

discussion to the global level. He recommends a more 'inclusive urbanism'. Based on his own life story, Florida points to the decline of the middle class and their suburban way of life. Combining his experiences and social changes, Florida gives his reader a good example of how the 'sociological imagination' (Mills 1999) works. He also makes a self-criticism of his earlier work in which he celebrated the recent developments of technology, talent and tolerance and the emergence of the 'creative class'. Yet, the outcome of that enrichment was not what Florida optimistically expected. Rather, urban space has turned into a place where inequality and segregation between those who have access to resources and those who do not have gradually increased. The middle class, the buffering class between the total winner and total loser, has gradually declined as well. Florida describes what has happened from an urban perspective.

The aims of the book are to define the basic dynamics of the urban crisis, to gain an insight into the forces that shape this crisis, and to propose some possible solutions to create inclusive urbanism. Inclusive urbanism refers to better job opportunities, better living conditions, and a better way of life for all. For the author, the new urban crisis has five basic dimensions. The first one is the growing disparity between a few cities that are superstar cities for the author such as New York, London, Hong Kong, Los Angeles and Paris and the rest of the cities in the world. Superstar cities are those that attract not only creative potentials in technology, talent and innovation especially in sectors like finance, media, entertainment and technology, but also money under the globalised economy. The second one is that

the accumulation of these potentials in a few cities have resulted in the overvaluation of the urban land, which might have affected even this new creative class and certainly affected other urban residents like blue collar workers, service workers and, naturally, the middle class. The third dimension is the growing inequality and segregation in the urban areas, while the fourth dimension is the concentration of poverty, insecurity and economic and racial segregation in the suburbs. Finally, the fifth dimension is the urbanisation crisis in the developing countries.

Florida explains these five dimensions in the following eight chapters. In Chapter Two, he explains why few superstar cities have won out over the others and that the outcome of this process is the increase in housing prices. Florida analyses the new urban battle as the outcome of the concentration of creative elites in Chapter Three. The author discusses gentrification to provide a more balanced perspective in Chapter Four. This perspective requires putting gentrification into a historical context in which neighbourhood transformations refers to continuous shifts and changes (p. 61) and also into larger social processes like public and private investment, location of universities and public transportation—especially trams, metros etc.—and green spaces rather than individual choices (p. 65). Gentrification takes place on a very selective basis and it is very much concentrated in certain neighbourhoods in superstar cities. Florida highlights that gentrification has bypassed the black neighbourhoods where residents are experiencing 'chronic and persistent poverty' (p. 77). In the following chapter, the author opens the Pandora Box because the growing inequalities in the cities are the result of not only globalisation and

technological changes or persistent poverty, but also policy choices associated with neoliberalism, such as the reduction of benefits and taxes and also anti-union measures (p. 88). The main theme of Chapter Six is the segregation in urban contexts, which is linked to income, education and occupational differences, and also 'racial' divisions within the US. In this and the previous chapter involving the combination of macro- and micro- findings, Florida persuades the reader that the growing inequality and segregation in cities forms the core of the New Urban Crisis. While superstar cities have attracted the creative powers of the new economy, the majority of the cities remain disadvantaged (p. 120). The author uses class-based data in order to present how the Patchwork Metropolis combines the residential location preferences of three different classes, namely the 'highly paid creative class, lower paid service class, and the working class' (p. 122). The decisions of the creative class are crucial and 'the rich live where they choose, and the poor live where they can' (p. 150). Despite the existence of the 'back to city movement', the privileged class prefers the suburbs. Yet, there is growing suburban poverty across America. Not only poverty but also increasing violence and the disappearance of middle-class jobs contribute to the decline of suburbs. Florida interprets this trend as a threat to the American dream and to economic growth in Chapter Eight. Contrary to superstar cities, urbanisation in the developing world occurs without economic development. In Chapter Nine, Florida analyses this trend and recommends policy makers to make an investment in the basic infrastructure in a city within the context of international collaboration. In the final chapter, Florida shares his proposal for

changing cities through a more cooperative effort so that they become more inclusive and egalitarian.

What is interesting in this book is that Florida combines and visualises various findings to support his arguments. The language used in the book is easy to follow, which also makes it easy for the readers to follow the arguments in the chapters. The scope of the book extends from the American experience of urban development to the global one. And yet, for the emphasis on the global one awaits further attention.

References

Mills, C. W. 1999. *Sociological Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Z. Nurdan Atalay

Bandirma Onyedi Eylul University, Turkey
natalay@bandirma.edu.tr

Douglas, Gordon C. C., 2018. *The Help-Yourself City: Legitimacy and Inequality in DIY Urbanism*. Oxford University Press.

Douglas' *Help-Yourself City* is relevant to urban imaginations that are sensitised to or curious about the ways in which cities, neighbourhoods, built environments and urban spaces take place. This book is an engaging ethnography which lays the groundwork for asking questions about urban placemaking, urban spaces and places, and urban inequality.

Help-Yourself City is based on five years of qualitative interviews and ethnographic research with people in cities mostly across the United States. The data includes 113 interviews with DIY urban designers and professional place makers, as well as an analysis of public web content, policy, and planning documents related to DIY urban design activities, and a database

of DIY urban design projects including over 400 projects. Altogether, Douglas builds a strong analysis of urban placemaking as it happens in informal and unsanctioned ways by people who take action to change aspects of their built environments for the public good.

The book is organised around seven chapters. In the introductory chapter, the reader is oriented to ideas of formal and informal placemaking practices, civic-mindedness and individualism, as well as the problematic socially reproductive, but also the transformative, potential of informal urban design. In Chapter Two, Douglas tackles the literature on *unauthorised urban space interventions* and in so doing carves out a new analytical category from his data which he calls *DIY urban design*: ‘small-scale and unauthorised yet intentionally functional and civic-minded physical interventions aimed at “improving” the urban streetscape in forms analogous to or inspired by official efforts’ (p. 26).

Douglas argues that this new category is appropriate for analysing unauthorised urban space interventions that are neither explicit acts of vandalism nor radical acts used to make critical social commentary. It is the formalised and institutionalised characteristics of DIY urban design that make this social phenomenon interesting, and the DIY urban design category analytically useful. In Chapter 3 Douglas explores the cultural logic that inform DIY urbanism which, he argues, is couched in an individualizing of civic responsibility. DIY urbanists are largely motivated by a perceived civic or social need and take it upon themselves to make the urban intervention, rather than entrusting it to market actors or local government.

Douglas finds that the majority of DIY urbanists he encountered and interviewed are white, well-educated, middle-class men. These intersecting identities have implications for DIY urbanism. Do-it-yourselfers ‘operate from a position of considerable privilege in public space and interactions with authority’ (p. 13) and have access to resources and networks that are useful for accomplishing DIY urbanism. Discussed in Chapter 4, some of the resources necessary include the professional knowledge of the do-it-yourselfers who incorporate formalised, professionalised, and standardised elements into their urban interventions. Douglas finds that many of the do-it-yourselfers he spoke to were familiar with urban policy and professional placemaking.

Chapter 5 is Douglas’ critical analysis of how DIY urbanism is rooted in social privilege and may be complicit in the spatial reproduction of social inequality. While do-it-yourselfers may be acting in ways they understand to be civic or socially responsible, they are paradoxically also engaging in practices that might be reproducing the very issues they hope to address in the built environment. This critical lens unpacks how urban placemaking practices are informed by social privilege and inequality, and how systemic social inequalities persist in urban places through the placemaking practices of people.

Chapter 6 turns attention to the relationship between DIY urbanism and formal urban planning and urban policy. This chapter is interesting because it makes connections between informal urban space interventions and professional placemaking. Douglas explores how professional place makers make sense of DIY urbanism, and how they negotiate their

often-conflicted stances. Interesting, too, is how informal, unsanctioned, and illegal DIY urbanism has become co-opted by local governments and private market actors.

Convincingly, Douglas points to the problematic ways in which this institutionalisation of DIY urbanism as local economic development and ‘tactical urbanism’ may further reproduce social inequalities in urban contexts. The final chapter pulls together the major themes of civic participation, urban citizenship, and individualism, legitimate and illegitimate urban placemaking practices, fuzzy distinctions between formality and informality, and the enduring problem of social inequality as they persist in urban contexts.

In all, Douglas accomplished three major tasks. First, he showcases the relevance of ethnography as a way to do research about urban life and to construct useful analytical categories from data at the level of lived experience. Second, he explores the relationship between place, place-based practices, and socio-spatial inequalities, privilege and legitimacy. Third, he contributes to an important scholarship on placemaking and how urban places are accomplished.

More so, I appreciate Douglas’ creative use of tools in doing the ethnography. Intertwined into the methodology of the project is the use of bicycles and cameras as data gathering tools. Douglas engages in ‘photo ethnography’ to capture the visual aspects of DIY urban design projects as well as the visual characteristics of the urban context. This is strategic because it highlights the significance of context for making analytical sense of DIY urbanism and urban design. The photo images, appropriately scattered throughout the text

of the book, are welcomed by the reader as they contextualise the projects discussed.

Douglas uses the bicycle as another tool for ethnography that, he argues, is particularly well-suited for exploring urban space at the level of everyday life. In cycling through a neighbourhood, the ethnographer can note changes in ‘land use and character and arrive in some ways already familiar with a place’ (p. 207). This creative use of tools in ethnography spurs important discussion about how we come to know about a place and the people that live in and move through them.

This book is appropriate for undergraduate students enrolled in upper level urban social sciences courses; particularly, courses related to urban sociology, urban planning, and urban policy courses. At the same time, the book will be a nice addition to the reading list of a graduate level course in these same subjects. Altogether, Douglas’ *Help-Yourself City* is a relevant contribution to understanding placemaking.

Wenonah Venter

University of South Florida, U.S.A.

wventer@mail.usf.edu

Jenia Mukherjee (ed.), 2018. *Sustainable Urbanization in India: Challenges and Opportunities*. Singapore: Springer Nature.

The world has become familiar with the idea of sustainable development with the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987 where the concept was defined as follows: ‘Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. But the idea of sustainable has been floating around in one form or other ever since Henry George formulated the concept of

Spaceship Earth, in which all creatures, human and non-human, need to live in harmony in order for the spaceship to sail without any trouble. A similar, though slightly different hypothesis of 'Gaia' was formulated by scientists like James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis in the 1970s. It talks about how living organisms interact with their surroundings on earth to form a synergistic and self-regulating system that helps to maintain and perpetuate the conditions for life on the planet. This rather optimistic view was radically challenged by the economist Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen in 1971, who argued that human beings are using non-renewable resources to advance economically: they are bound to be exhausted sooner than later. The implication was that the world must shift to renewable resources in order to survive. The escalating use of exhaustible resources has brought in severe problems in the accumulation of greenhouse gases bringing with it problems of climate change; the Arctic Circle becoming navigable for the first time in history; Greenland and the Himalayas losing their icebergs and glaciers at an alarming rate; sea levels rising all over the world, already submerging many Pacific islands; biodiversity being damaged on land and in the oceans; the air of many big cities becoming unbreathable, causing severe respiratory diseases and lung cancer; and, so on and so on.

All this is the result of capitalist, profit-seeking industrialisation and accompanying urbanisation. Not all industrialisation is, however, driven by profit-seeking capitalists. After World War II, many of the newly independent countries adopted 'developmentalism' as state policy. When that led to a policy of industrialisation at any cost, it caused as much damage to the environment and the welfare of ordinary

people as profit-driven industrialisation. Way back in the 1920s Rabindranath Tagore wrote an allegorical play called *Raktakarabi* (Red Oleander) to depict the evils of unregulated industrialisation.

Not all urbanisation is driven by industrialisation. In India, the focus of Mukherjee's volume, urbanisation is driven by both push and pull factors. In this age of neoliberal globalisation, agriculture has become increasingly unremunerative for medium and small farmers, the cost of seeds, fertilisers, irrigation and pesticides leaving little margin as income. So many of them crowd into cities in the hope of bettering their chances. The spread of education in rural areas has also encouraged ambitious young men and women to migrate to nearby small towns and cities where they have joined various professions. This has led to the sprawl of squat and slums, because a large proportion of migrants cannot afford decent housing.

The current volume has brought together some of the best students of cityscapes, sociologists, political ecologists, hydrologists and economists in India. The volume adopts a multi-disciplinary approach so that it is neither necessary nor fruitful to put the writers into one category or another. This point can be illustrated by the example of the editor, Jenia Mukherjee herself. She has written papers on the political history of India and China, on the history of the wetlands around Kolkata, on the chars (sedimentary formations of islands in the bed of the river, which, if large enough can invite settlements or cultivators, creating social and sometimes diplomatic problems when they happen to be on the border of India and Bangladesh), has studied the problems of human development and diplomacy created by the chars upstream and downstream of

Farakka Barrage, and studied the way a branch of the Bhagirathi (Adi Ganga) has been converted into a sewer of Kolkata and how to remedy the situation.

The intention of the editor was made clear in the Preface: it was ‘to identify city-specific sources of challenges and opportunities and explore strategies and potentials to make the process of urban transition both equitable and sustainable’. The last, of course, is a daunting task, because the question of sustainability apart, the process of urbanisation has been highly inequitable, both internally and spatially — metropolises like New Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai or Kolkata — drawing most of the resources at the cost of smaller towns within the region. This tendency is likely to be exacerbated with the central government declaring its intention of creating 100 ‘smart cities’. What will happen to the hundreds of not-so-smart towns spread all over India?

In the chapters in this volume, the problems facing the metropolises mentioned above have been covered along with challenges faced by smaller cities like Ahmadabad, Patna, Udaipur and Visakhapatnam.

The issues analysed by the contributors range from the broader question of what meaning can be given to ‘sustainability’ in the urban context, structural constraints of urbanisation, governance systems that can be accessible to the urban poor, the danger of slum clearance leading to the dominance of the real estate lobby over the process of urbanisation, the importance of the peri-urban water bodies for sustaining Kolkata, providing tenurial security to the urban poor, and management of various kinds of waste and managing water supply in a situation of water scarcity. The last has become of emergent importance in view of

the extreme scarcity of water in Bengaluru and rationing of water in Chennai.

The volume is extremely timely in view of the fact that the speed of urbanisation in India and most of the Third World countries is going to accelerate and market-dominated urbanisation will inflict untold misery on ordinary people (prevalent air pollution will not spare the rich either) and cause further damage to an ecologically fragile world. I hope that policy-makers and opinion-makers, not only in India but all over the developing world, will heed the warnings sounded by the specialists gathered in this volume and judiciously adopt at least some of the advice proffered by them.

Amiya Kumar Bagchi

Emeritus Professor

Institute of Development Studies Kolkata

Email: amiya.bagchi@gmail.com

Velasco, Alenandro, 2015. *Barrio Rising: Urban Politics and the Making of Modern Venezuela*. California: University of California Press.

In *Barrio Rising: Urban Popular Politics and the Making of Modern Venezuela*, Alejandro Velasco describes the 30-year history of a mid-century, Brutalist-inspired mega block housing development where residents organised multiple political strategies in their quest for democracy. In the 1950s a new military regime cleared slums in Caracas, Venezuela’s capital city. When this dictatorship fell on 23 January 1958 citizens rushed to occupy illegally the unfinished housing project. These new residents renamed the neighbourhood 23 de Enero to honour the emerging dictatorship. Velasco’s study provides a prequel to the rise of socialist president Hugo Chavez and the collapse of the modern regime.

However, the study uses a wide brush to tell Venezuela's political history through this housing project without providing specifics about the roles groups and individuals played in these events or the design's impact on these events.

Velasco divides the book's seven chapters across three parts. In Part One, *Landscapes of Opportunity*, he includes two chapters. The first describes the 23 de Enero neighbourhood's transformation under Marco Perez Jimenez from an urban barrio to a complex of modern high-rise buildings for the former slum dwellers. Chapter Two focuses on the overthrow of the Jimenez regime as citizens began occupying the unfinished housing project within days of the regimes' collapse. Once the resident dwellings were occupied completely, people began re-creating the demolished slums in what had planned to be open green spaces between buildings. The 23 de Enero neighbourhood emerged as a large voting block focused on urban political reforms. As their candidates lost national elections to rural-backed ones, the residents resorted to guerrilla warfare.

In Part Two, *Paths to Democracy*, Velasco examines how the residents adjusted their political strategies as Venezuela urbanised nationally and moved towards democracy. Chapter Three covers the tenuous conflicts between 1958 and 1963 as well as the 23 de Enero's links to international political movements. For example, Fidel Castro's first overseas state visit to Venezuela with his first stop being the 23 de Enero. The neighbourhood went in and out of violent periods as the new Betancourt regime struggled with insurrection leading to the guerilla violence in the housing project until the 1968 national election.

In Part Three, *Streets of Protest*, Velasco examines the emergence of a new mobilisation and discourse between the 23 de Enero residents as the 1950s promises of a democracy re-emerged. In the 1970s focusing on community organizing, Velasco uses Chapter 5 to describe how residents turning to political issues based on local needs and demands ignored by the national regimes during the 1960s guerrilla warfare. In Chapter 6, *A Weapon as Powerful as the Veto*, he shows that by the early 1980s this community organizing moved into radical actions such as hijacking garbage trucks and other public service vehicles in the neighbourhood. Facing increased economic crisis by the late 1980s, the Venezuelan government shifted the mega block public housing development to condominiums for the existing residents. While previous generations protested against the state for their demands, organizing protests in other neighbourhoods outside 23 de Enero proved difficult. In Chapter 7 Velasco wraps by revisiting the 1999 Carazco massacre contextualizing the relationships between neighbourhoods and the Venezuelan government. He concludes by arguing that the rise of Hugo Chavez rests not in his emergence in the 1980s to the national scene but from the 1950s struggles by 23 de Enero residents.

This book is geared to readers possessing some general to advanced knowledge and understanding of Latin American but more specifically, Venezuelan history and politics. Velasco presents the work from his background as a historian. Velasco documents the national political events occurring with extensive citations but provides little guidance to readers trying to follow the different regimes and political parties over a six-decade period. Those approaching this

study from sociological or anthropological backgrounds will be frustrated by this focus on macro national events without clear ties to the 23 de Enero residents or housing complex. Readers are never provided with more than a notation that the slum dwellers moved into 23 de Enero. We do not know how homogenous or diverse the residents are nor what might be the socio-economic basis for this. Velasco offers an occasional quote or comment from an interview with a 23 de Enero resident or former one. However, there are no explicit links on the organisation of urban opposition groups in the mega project. For example, the attacks that residents organise in the 1970s are described just as occurring. Readers do not get any insights into how these protestors organised nor their rationale for focusing on the hijacking attacks to service providers in the mega-blocks.

From an architectural or urban planning perspective, you would expect to see more explicit links between the 23 de Enero's mid-century modern, brutalist Bauhaus-inspired urban design and the rise of political actors from the mega-blocks. In the introduction, Velasco offers detailed schematic maps of all sectors in 23 de Enero including a time frame from 1955-58 of the mega project's development process. However, there is no follow up as to how this construction process or later finished design influences residents' behaviours and actions. Velasco mentions that once all residential units were occupied, new arrivals recreated the slum districts they left in what were supposed to be public open green spaces between high-rises. But, Velasco never discusses how these on-site settlement patterns influence the 23 de Enero's political activism. There is a long history of research from Jane Jacob's critiques of New York City Planning

Director Robert Moses' demolition of low-rise ethnic enclaves to Herbert Gans' studies of Boston neighbourhood slated for Urban Renewal clearance going back to the 1950s. Outside the U.S. context, studies note the similarities in post-World War II brutalist designs among Western European democracies' housing complex design to Soviet-era ones in Eastern Europe. In the Global South context, the void decks common in Indian and Asian mega cities are re-imagined by residents for additional recreational and garden uses. Here, Velasco provides no direct links other than a description of the 23 de Enero's design. Specifically, what is so unique about the urban design that 23 de Enero became a hub of political opposition?

For Latin American scholars, Velasco's book provides a detailed overview of the political regime changes through brutal revolutions in Venezuela as well as the linkages to other political movements in the region. Velasco's work is well-documented and sourced. However, he paints his arguments about the 23 de Enero's design and political organisations with a very broad brush. This will frustrate sociologists and anthropologists interested in the links among political activism and urban design.

William Grady Holt

Birmingham-Southern College. U.S.A.

wholt@bsc.edu
