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Book Reviews

Neoliberal urban policy and the transformation of the city: Reshaping Dublin by Andrew MacLaran and Sinéad Kelly, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 286 pp., £68.00, ISBN 978-1-137-37704-3.

Since 2008, the Irish economy and society have undergone a profound transformation and this timely volume examines the background context, root causes and urban implications – both physical and social – of this change. It draws together a range of contributors many of whom have been graduate students at, or closely associated with, the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at Trinity College Dublin. Within the context of broader calls in the academic literature to examine how neoliberalism plays itself out in different spatial contexts, this book focuses on an examination of 'actually existing neoliberalism' in Dublin over the last three decades. The book comprises seventeen short chapters, sub-divided into four sections. It is an important contribution to a growing body of work on the neoliberalisation and financialisation of the urban environment.

Section 1 of the book sets the general framework within which later empirical chapters are situated. The overall argument of this section is that neoliberal ideologies and policymaking have become deeply embedded in Irish political culture and institutional structures, including planning. The opening two chapters provide an excellent overview of the genealogy of neoliberalism and its permeation into urban administration generally (Chapter 1) as well as how it became embedded more specifically in an Irish context (Chapter 2). A variety of examples are offered to illustrate the roll back of the state in some domains, such as banking regulation (Chapter 3), and the rolling forward of a new modus operandi in others, such as through Strategic Development Zones (Chapter 4). The final chapter in this section draws out the ways in which this broader context impacted on the operation of planning in Dublin, particularly in its increasingly entrepreneurial operation (Chapter 5). While this is an important point, there is arguably significant repetition between this final chapter and others in the section and perhaps the key messages of this chapter could have been better drawn out within a slightly longer Chapter 2 or Chapter 4.

Section 2 comprises four chapters that continue to set the contextual framework but through a specific focus on the drivers of over-production in the office (Chapter 6) and residential sectors (Chapters 7 and 8) in Dublin and Ireland. While access to easy credit and weak regulation of the financial sector provided the conditions for over-development, state intervention in the form of tax breaks for both developers and home-owners (Chapter 8) facilitated the financialisation of home ownership and resulted in significant costs to the state (Chapter 9) once the global financial crisis hit.

The focus shifts in Section 3 to an examination of neoliberalisation in practice via a discussion of different urban policy and governance approaches, ranging from the reliance on public-private partnerships for public infrastructure (Chapters 10 and 14)

to gentrification of the inner city (Chapters 11 and 12) and the construction of new 'participatory' structures (Chapters 13 and 15). The six chapters in this section provide very rich empirical analyses demonstrating how various elements of 'neoliberalism' play out in particular spaces of the city. The overall theme is that Dublin is increasingly being developed for, and marketed towards, an affluent middle-class with consequent detrimental effects on the working-class communities that have traditionally inhabited the inner city. This is occurring through a transformation of the state from within (Chapter 10) and without, for example, through the use of private consultants to de-politicise regeneration proposals (Chapter 15). Underlying many of the chapters in this section is a strong critique of how the local state has operated in Dublin in relation to regeneration. However, it could be argued that this has been dramatically affected by the restricted mandate of local government and that one of the unique aspects of the Dublin context, and perhaps downplayed at times, is the heavily influential role of central government in the transformation of the city.

The final section includes two chapters that focus on public resistance to neoliberal urban policy and the crisis generated by neoliberalism. Chapter 16 traces the history of community engagement with, and struggle over, regeneration in the inner city over many decades. This ranged from the emergence of housing action committees in the 1960s, through to partnership based approaches in the 1990s with a more 'back to the street' approach being adopted in the wake of the financial crisis. The final chapter of the book deals with the consequences of the economic crisis and the historic role of ideology in shaping Irish social and political life. However, this chapter could have been strengthened through the inclusion of a more focused and forward-looking analysis of the key development challenges facing Dublin and a more specific urban focus.

One of the key strengths of this book is its very detailed focus on a particular city and the forensic analyses of how processes, evident internationally, are playing out in Ireland's capital. However, this strength is also one of the books limitations. For readers less familiar with the Irish context, it is difficult to orientate oneself spatially and culturally in some of the chapters. For example, Chapter 2 quite specifically names particular parts of the city, but without a map, or series of maps, it is hard to position or place these. Similarly, Chapter 13 introduces the idea of social partnership as a key context for how community participation unfolded, but, in Ireland, this took a very specific form that needs explanation for an overseas or unfamiliar reader. One of the challenges in writing about the Irish urban context is the very closely intertwined nature of central and local and this is evident in a number of chapters where the focus appears to be more on the general Irish situation rather than the specific Dublin context. This difficulty could potentially have provided an opportunity to situate the Dublin story within the wider Irish urban context and contribute to a deeper understanding of the commonalities or particularities of neoliberal urban policy as it is grounded in particular national settings.

Neoliberal urban policy and the transformation of the city: Reshaping Dublin is a very ambitious project and brings together in one volume many decades of scholarship. It is a significant contribution to understanding how global processes and ideologies

intersect with national policies and local actions, and illuminates the complexities and differentiated impacts at the urban scale. It will be of particular interest to urban geographers, sociologists, planners and policymakers, and those interested in the evolution of Dublin as a city.

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Dublin, 1950–1970: houses, flats and high-rise by Joseph Brady, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2016, 452 pp., €55 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-84682-623-8.

Towards the back of Joseph Brady's second instalment to his urban geography trilogy of Dublin from 1930 to the 1970s, *Dublin 1950–1970: houses, flats and high-rise*, we encounter his layered colourful approach to sketching spatial history. Moving away from housing provision and as signposts to his forthcoming third volume, Brady's closing chapters overview Dublin's social structures in 1971 and the wider urban situation, including relevant issues of car ownership and office development. And as we have come to expect from Brady's colourful civic portraits, informality helps with complex urban conditions; this time, through Jimmy O'Dea's verse – *Someone must live in Kilmainham, so it's hardly fair to blame 'em, and in Dartry they are almost civilised…* – Brady tackles the tricky and oft immeasurable conditions of neighbourhoods, snobbery and social status. His analysis is confident, and hugely enlightening.

Most impressive to this reader is Brady's deftness with statistics; a deftness which is upheld throughout the book's 400 pages, culminating in his appendix presentation of census material from 1951 – 61. Clearly, we are at school and the book's general feeling is part textbook, part official report. Firstly, there is probably less visual material than desired in a spatial history – though this may be dismissed as an aesthetic consideration? Secondly, the research is tireless and dogged, akin perhaps to an excellent post-graduate thesis but without that incessant interruption of references. By the author's admission, the wonderful postcard views which he cleverly stitched through his previous volume *Dublin 1930–1950*, were simply lacking during this period. As such, the book is more reliant on tables, an assortment of photography from the author's own to aerial google-earth views, newspaper ads (mostly for building tenders) and occasional very humorous *Dublin Opinion* cartoons, to break up the text and bring some visual spice to the page. And despite his claim for the weakness of the 25-inch series of OS maps (they weren't regularly revised after the mid-1940s) for this volume, Brady continues his tradition of doing great work with maps, presenting significant analysis around shifts in occupation, for instance.

In terms of the book's general leaning towards textbook or report, its research content is extensive but perhaps, 'kitchen sink 'n all'. For Brady, we sense that editorial prescription points to a lack of knowledge or research and here, the author has made it

his business to know a lot and to un-turn most stones. He has meticulously mined the Dublin Corporation minute books and reports, and works hard to present those Housing Committee findings to the reader through easily consumable tables. In many ways, the proliferation of tables illustrates the nature of the subject and the problem with editing – can anything be justifiably left out, in this, the first comprehensive sketching of Dublin's housing question during the period 1950 to 1970? The fact that the subject warranted its own book – perhaps as a breakaway from Brady's next (and third) volume – expresses housing's significance, which as the editors write, 'has the greatest day-to-day impact upon its citizens.'

Certainly, Brady takes this impact seriously and in his discussion of the Ballymun Estate – from the crisis of the early 1960s and the search for new building technologies, to the early 1970s' petitions to fix the tower-block lifts – we encounter the fullest overview of the place and its origins, written to date. From that account, we sense Brady's desire to tell the whole story. He is not preoccupied by critical interpretation and for such, he rightly refers to Erika Hanna (contemporary Irish history) or Sinead Power (cultural geography). Brady's is a different project. But because this housing history is so vast, everyday and recent, it feels like a more transdisciplinary approach is needed. While the author does try to contextualise Dublin's piecemeal and generally distrusted flat-block building programme by introducing some international examples, that discussion ('The European Context') stands apart and is never threaded through the rich Dublin research. Maybe that is the moment when new Irish architectural history could be called forth? Though the USSR-related *panelaky*, Vienna's Karl Marx-Hof and even Le Corbusier's *Unités* do indeed make for compelling precedents, the flavour of Irish mid-twentieth century housing is undoubtedly that of London and Liverpool County Councils, with a light peppering of Swedish soft modernism.

In the end, though, what we have with Joseph Brady's *Dublin, 1950–1970: houses, flats and high-rise* is a really important contribution to Irish urban studies. Enlightening us on our physical surroundings and places of home, Brady's urban geography sets the record straight. It is honest and determined, with no pretence. And in being pragmatic, it becomes wholly useful to scholars and general readers alike. The book's highlight is its chunkiest chapter, 'A Revitalised Housing Programme': an embarrassment of riches, moving through the making of Corporation colonies at Ballyfermot and Finglas, and through the building endeavours of private associations and public utility societies. This reader learned more than she cares to admit around such issues as vacancies in the late 1950s. Mostly, it opens up the history of ordinary houses and unremarkable estates, like Milltown and Walkinstown, where thousands and thousands of Dubliners have grown up. Without the controversy of bad reputations, such places are ignored and never rationalised but with Brady's book, all of that begins to change.

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More than concrete blocks: Dublin city's twentieth-century buildings and their stories, Volume 1: 1900-40, edited by Ellen Rowley, Dublin, Dublin City Council with University College Dublin and Four Courts Press, 2016, 368 pp., €24.95 (paperback only), ISBN: 781902703442.

Implicit in the current debate about the government's Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework is an understanding of urban Ireland. While Dublin remains a focus of the economic and political priorities outlined in the document, there is a re-assertion of the urban form present elsewhere too. We might be beginning to see how the term 'urban' might too be used to apply to a form and not a place. If Dublin remains the political focus for the Planning Framework, geographers are currently absorbed in several analyses of a changing Dublin. Entrepreneurial, gentrifying and the location for global capital seeking rent, this Dublin is being pulled apart as an exemplar of the way that European cities are changing rapidly. We ask, 'how is Dublin like Barcelona / Hamburg / Bordeaux?' as if only to confirm that yes, Dublin too is an urban space. Rowley's remarkable volume *More Than Concrete Blocks* is welcome then because it looks back to see the formation of a modern city as the outcome of interwoven processes, many of which find echoes, often now unacknowledged, in our current urban geographies.

This is volume one in a three-volume series, extending from 1900 to 1940. The remaining two volumes will focus on 1940 to 1973 and the period from then until the beginning of the 21st century. The series represents a vital and necessary contribution to our understanding of what urban means in an Irish context. Geographers may find the site-specific focus a little frustrating but it is a good addition to any urban researcher's collection. The book is made up of three parts: the editor's introductory essays, 26 case studies (public buildings, houses, industrial units) researched by the project's team and finally an Outline Survey of Dublin's architecture during this period. There is little consistency of choice in the 26 case studies but this is flagged early. This is not to detract from the book's ambition but a function of available records and related documents. Rowley's opening essay casts Dublin as being not entirely comfortable with being the new state's leading urban space. It was, at one and the same time, stubbornly tied to the rural economy and yet representative of a new spirit of progress and modernity. The early 20th century architecture seemed to hark back to Georgian splendour with grand facades on new buildings like the National Concert Hall or the Technical School at Bolton Street, almost in trying to please the colonial administrator just over the shoulder of its architects. Post-independence, political imperatives turned outward to take in Dutch and American influences as is seen in the Gas Building on D'Olier Street and middle class housing schemes of the 1930s. There is no clear temporal division meant here but the division instead serves as a way into decoding the changing circumstances between 1920 and 1930.

The individual case studies, complimented by Paul Tierney's contemporary photographs, provide an overview of many forms of urban space. A particularly interesting study is provided by Natalie de Róiste on the Dublin Artisans' Dwelling Company housing in Stoneybatter. These DADCo units, reflecting their southside equivalents, provided

small but well-constructed housing for working class people and helped the formation of a distinctive urban fabric that endures to the present day. At a time (c.1907) when the Corporation was struggling to house Dublin's residents, philanthropic and cooperative-built housing formed a significant part of our present day understanding of Dublin's urban fabric. Another case study, Shane O'Toole's research on St George's and St Thomas' Church on Cathal Brugha Street casts light on an overlooked gem of rare 20th century religious building within the city's core. Here is a building providing a service to a declining Church of Ireland population (it was completed in 1932) alongside others while also acting as an exam hall for the nearby DIT college. This part of the urban streetscape is about to undergo significant revision with the Luas cross city project nearing completion. The volume is rounded off with an Outline Survey of 98 additional sites, compiled again by Natalie de Róiste from the Irish Architectural Archive and other sources. It paints pen pictures of everything from memorial halls to disused tramway sub stations. It reveals a city created across several waves of urban development, none of which fit into neat temporal phases.

This book is both a resource for everyday research and an inspiration for understanding the composition of an Irish urban form. Geographers would find the focus of individual buildings of interest if only to prompt an examination of the broader context within which the case studies are framed. If our urban spaces seem haphazardly organised that is because they are, they arise from an underlying conflict about what and who the city is for. If there is one criticism, it might be that the choice of case studies (in both the main book and those at the rear) finds no central theme other than that many were found and so included. But this is not meant to be an exhaustive academic examination of the city's buildings and neighbourhoods. It is an effort to catalogue the many styles, forms and functions across the city in the first four decades of the 20th century. It is a beautifully produced volume about the development of the city and its suburbs. Its focus is squarely on the architectural detail of buildings, bridges and housing but there is much here that geographers and a wider public will find fascinating.

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