

THE QUEST FOR DEMOCRACY IN DESIGN AND PLANNING DECISION MAKING

BOOK REVIEW: 'DEMOCRATIC DESIGN: PARTICIPATION CASE STUDIES IN URBAN AND SMALL TOWN ENVIRONMENTS BY HENRY SANOFF'

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**Democratic Design: Participation Case Studies
in Urban and Small Town Environments
Henry Sanoff'**

A new round of discussion on participatory design by a committed architect, consultant and educator and a giant in the field of community design is available to the international community. In this book Henry Sanoff presents some of the important cases that elucidate how design processes can be democratized. Sanoff discusses participatory design as a way to apply democratic principles into the creation of meaningful environments. He argues "Participatory design is an attitude about a force for change in the creation and management of environments for people. Its strength lies in being a movement that cuts across traditional professional boundaries and cultures. Its roots lie in the ideals of a participatory democracy where collective decision-making is highly decentralized throughout all sectors of society, so that all individuals learn participatory skills and can effectively participate in various ways in the making of all decisions that affect them." One should note that based on a strong belief and value system Sanoff has been working in the field of participatory and community design for over four decades and his work has resulted in many design interventions that reflect such a long and outstanding career. Merely, this manifests

a sustained quest for democracy in design and planning decision-making.

Democratic Design-Participation Case Studies in Urban and Small Town Environments includes four main chapters and an appendix. The first is an introductory chapter that sets the stage for a comprehensive, yet concise, understanding of participatory design and its association with democracy. The second chapter offers four case studies in small towns in Australia, North Carolina, and Japan. The third chapter presents three cases implemented in urban neighborhoods in Virginia, North Carolina, and Mexico. The fourth chapter presents four cases relevant to the design of community facilities in Kentucky, Brazil, North Carolina and Minnesota.

Notably, the selection of cases and their classification is unique. Cases related to small towns reflect current interests in Australia, Japan, and United States. They address key factors and issues that shape a successful intervention in a small town including cultural norms, social structure, the economy of a locality, and the way in which these factors are interconnected. Likewise, cases relevant to urban neighborhoods address issues that pertain to the question of what constitutes an urban neighborhood, its growth, and its spatial and symbolic qualities. Most important, the cases speak to current condition of neighborhoods (being) and how their future might be (becoming). On the other hand, cases related to community facilities address issues associated with 'buy-in' from user groups, while answering the question of how the process of introducing a community facility draws from networks such as civic organizations.

In essence, the book represents three sets of case studies in urban and small town environments

in Australia, Brazil, Japan, Mexico and the United States. They reveal a variety of community participation methods that can be adapted for use in different contexts. Evidently, the methods implemented embody integral components of design processes. They are appropriate for use in both developed and developing contexts and are pertinent to a variety of building types and scales. The appendix is of great value since it presents tools that contribute to an efficient and effective implementation of participatory design processes.

It is important to note that Sanoff's approach integrates the two types of democracy into design and planning decision-making. One type is representative democracy or advocacy where people exercise the making of decisions through representatives (user representatives), especially in cases where involving actual users is not achievable. Another type is direct democracy or participatory democracy where making decisions is exercised by a larger body of actual users, potential users, and other groups who share the same system of values and recognize the need for introducing change toward the improvement of their environment.

One should note that the Democratic Design-Participation Case Studies in Urban and Small Town Environments complements earlier works by Sanoff in which many other cases were presented and analytically described. In this respect, his earlier book titled '53 Research Papers in Social Architecture (1965-2005),' addresses a wide spectrum of issues and themes that include people preferences, assessment methods, environmental cognition, environmental evaluation, ecological planning, energy and behavior, participatory architecture, post occupancy evaluation, and pre-design and programming. As well, his book titled 'Three

Decades of Design and Community' presents analytical discussion of cases developed by the many graduates of the Community Design Group CDG of the College of Design, North Carolina State University NCSU under his guidance.

While some scholars may claim that many of the participatory and community design ideas and concepts which are debated in recent literature, are fairly new, one should assert that the roots of these ideas were generated, developed, and implemented, and are evident in the early and the new work of Sanoff.

Indeed, Democratic Design-Participation Case Studies in Urban and Small Town Environments is a collection of cases that advances the discussion on community and participatory design. The book is of great value to architects, planners, local authorities, public officials, educators of architecture and urban planning, and citizens who wish to make it possible for people to be involved in shaping their future environment.

Sanoff's Books include

- *Democratic Design* (VDM Verlag, 2010)
- *Community Participation in School Planning* (VDM Verlag, 2009)
- *53 Research Papers in Social Architecture: 1965-2005* (Aardvark Global Publishing, 2006)
- *Programming and Participation in Architectural Design* (Universitat Politècnica Catalunya, 2005)
- *School Building Assessment Methods* (National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, 2003)
- *Community Participation in Design and Planning* (Wiley, 2000)
- *Creating Environments for Young Children* (National Endowment of the Arts, 1995)
- *School Design* (Wiley, 1994)
- *Integrating Programming Evaluation and Participation in Design* (Avebury, 1993)
- *Visual Research Methods in Design* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991)

- *Participatory Design: Theory and Techniques* (Bookmasters, 1990)
- *Planning Outdoor Play* (Humanics, 1982)
- *Learning Environments for Children* (Humanics, 1981)
- *Design Games* (Kauffman, 1978)
- *Designing with Community Participation* (McGraw Hill, 1978)
- *Methods of Architectural Programming* (Dowden Hutchinson & Ross, 1977)

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