

BOOK REVIEW

Transcultural Cities: Border-Crossing and Placemaking

Jeffrey Hou (Ed.)

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Transcultural Cities is an edited text containing a diverse and cross-disciplinary selection of case studies centred around place-making through transcultural processes. The 21 chapters focus on distinct and specific spaces where cultures meet, and the strategies taken as communities negotiate with and around each other. The key idea in this text is the concept of transculturalism, and the authors draw from Pratt (1992), among others, to note how places are changed through the different cultures acting and interacting upon them. This book ultimately seeks lessons from the case studies, and Hou in his introductory chapter outlines the ways in which transcultural spaces potentially make cities safer and more accessible for their increasingly diverse populations, creating more livable urban experiences and mutual understanding.

The rest of the book is divided into five parts, each containing four chapters. The first, *Placemaking at the Margins*, presents a series of case studies: South Asian Muslims in Chicago, Brazilian restaurants in Tokyo, West African immigrants in Seattle, and Chinese traditional festivals in Yangon, respectively. These chapters examine the way marginalised communities – particularly immigrants – inhabit specific places and change the nature of those spaces. For example, in Chapter 2, Sen's case study shows how the community combines religious (prayer) practice with commercial (restaurant) use to produce a transcultural space that can be used for different, and often changing, purposes. In this sense, places that would otherwise be classified as "ethnic" spaces, which tend to exclusivity, instead invite and support multiple communities, inviting hybridities and transcultural identities and activities.

The second part, *Placemaking in the Space of Flows*, is not dissimilar from the first. The chapters continue to examine the transcultural spaces produced by migrant communities: Korean students and small business owners in the Philippines, Chinese migrants in Sydney, Asian migrant workers in West Malaysia, and migrant workers in Sheffield. However, the focus here is on flows, in which the movement of diverse peoples and cultures into and out of the space is key in the changing nature of the place. In Chapter 8, for example, Chang and Foo's case study examines how migrant workers from a diversity of origins: Nepal, Indonesia, Thailand, Bangladesh, among others, interact with the Chinese and Malay community in Kampung Kanthan in

Malaysia. As these groups engage in activities involving the shared spaces of sports fields and temples and participate in the act of music-making in public space, transcultural placemaking occurs. Both activities and spaces are shared concurrently, and cultural barriers are broken down between groups, creating mutual understanding and shared experiences. Rishbeth in Chapter 9 employs a walking and audio method to understand how migrants perceive their communities and neighbourhoods, and goes a step further by offering research implications and guidance for practitioners to address how places can be made more accessible for diverse groups of people and empower their residents.

Part three, *Bridging Spaces of Difference*, focuses on building bridges between disparate parts of the community. Often this means building transcultural networks and connections, particularly for new arrivals to the city. Case studies in this part involve intercultural negotiations between diverse groups within a landscape: immigrant residents of a public housing development in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, the Latino, African American, and Southeast Asian population in “Cambodia Town” at Central Long Beach, California, diverse groups in the Village at Market Creek in Southeast San Diego, and the changing ethnic composition of suburban schools in Fremont, California. In Chapters 11 and 12, authors Chan and Rios address the strategies involved in constructing landscapes that support their diverse populations and intercultural learning, interaction, and belonging. The value of these chapters is in the way the careful and considered construction of physical spaces can help to promote social integrity, cross-cultural exchanges, and a more equitable distribution of power (Rios, p.164).

Building Communities across Cultures, part four of the text, approaches transcultural cities from a different angle. The four chapters address strategies that empower communities to create their own transcultural space, and focus on the methods around community building. Two of the case studies in this part are located in West Salt Lake City: Cahill's addressing undocumented youth, and Mai and Schmit's focusing on how the University of Utah engages with immigrant communities. The other two case studies involve immigrant communities in Seattle's International District, and a community garden in North Oakland, California. This part also focuses heavily on the methodologies used to gather information and data about how communities use spaces and interact. This is useful because the communities are given agency to effect changes in their spaces and neighbourhoods, rather than attempting to modify such landscapes in a top-down, structural approach. Such strategies, as Mai and Schmit (Chapter 15) note, entail capacity building and empowerment (p. 208), providing residents with the means and the authority to make decisions that affect their own communities and neighbourhoods. Hou (Chapter 16) elucidates participatory design through a “photovoice” technique that allows the community to engage with decisions in neighbourhood design. Prince (Chapter 17) looks at how urban agriculture has the potential to unite diverse neighbourhoods and empower residents in many ways. These methods promote engagement, collaboration, and participation from all levels of the community, ensuring voices are heard, and traditional barriers are lowered.

The final part, *Struggles for Transcultural Cities*, looks at the ongoing struggles that transcultural communities have, particularly as they bump up against structural entities, like municipal governments, planners and developers. The case studies in this final part consider minority community access to parks in Lancaster, Indonesian small businesses in Taipei, Newly Arrived Persons (NAPs) in Hong Kong, and immigrants in Rome. These chapters bring to light the uneven distribution of power and access to resources marginalized groups often face. Chen (Chapter 19) reveals the frequent disruption to the Indonesian businesses and migrants' daily lives in Taiwan by law enforcement, indicating that transcultural placemaking is not always desirable to

everyone. Siu (Chapter 20) discusses the complex relationships that NAPs have with the Hong Kong authorities and long-time residents, resulting in negotiations around access to and alternative uses of public space.

Covering a diversity of cities all over the world, this collection of case studies is invaluable for its breadth of geographical scope. In providing a myriad of examples, the lessons gleaned from the case studies are many and wide-ranging. The strategies offered from these transcultural spaces and situations include supporting spaces of encounter and interaction, making such spaces and interactions safer, promoting mutual understanding and learning between groups and communities, providing methods and approaches to promote transcultural placemaking, for example by community agents, and finally, providing ways to transform sites of conflict into places of opportunity (Hou, p.9-13). While none of the case studies completely incorporate all of these lessons, it is clear that negotiation takes place, whether or not there is strategic intervention. Results are additionally varied: contributors tend to highlight the positive outcomes of the negotiations and interventions. However, chapters like Chen's (Chapter 19) note that the struggles over sites can remain contentious and residents remain wary. As such, these contact zones do not always become "places of opportunity", but their identities and meanings remain active processes that keep shifting as residents continue to negotiate with each other. This book is an excellent contribution to the field of diversity planning and a valuable resource for researchers and practitioners involved in global, immigration and urban issues.

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References

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