Book Reviews
Iconic Planned Communities and the Challenge of Change

Editors: Mary Corbin Sies, Isabelle Gournay, and Robert Freestone
Publisher: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019
ISBN: 9780812251142
Review by: Elisha Long, Long Blackledge Architects

It is curious to be reviewing a book on planned communities in the midst of a global pandemic of such significant proportions. The core value of planned communities throughout time has been health and the best possible quality of life for its inhabitants. The continued existence and considerable beauty of many of these planned communities should remind us of the benefits of high-quality large-scale planning and design, though the execution sometimes did not meet the high intentions of the original proposal. The book focuses on the importance of ongoing governance controls and the need to ensure that the intentions of the original design are stewarded through maturing control processes which allow for the changing contexts of each generation: ‘few jurisdictions have effective mechanisms for preserving key features of master planning entire communities…’ (p7).

A sense of the potential fragility of these controls is a key feature of the book. Even where they were once well established, political changes, economic shifts, changes to local industry and employment or gentrification can quickly diminish essential designed qualities of the community to the detriment of the whole. This can lead to the reduction or loss of key features, e.g. the views though a neighbourhood (as in John Charles Olmstead’s Uplands on Vancouver Island), or the loss of significant building fabric (Menteng, Indonesia), poorly considered additions to original buildings (Greenbelt, Maryland or Batovany-Partizanske, Slovakia) or communal features (community gardens, Garbatella, Rome). Some communities have found solutions to the pressures of change, but for many it is an ongoing process which needs continual care and vigilance.

The strength of this book is the range of examples provided: 23 case studies from 6 continents. There are examples of worker housing or company towns by enlightened industrialists, like New Lanark (begun 1785) near Glasgow, or Batovany-Partizanske (1930s) in Slovakia. There are many examples of Garden City Movement suburbs, like Riverside (1860s Chicago), Letchworth, Hampstead and Welwyn garden cities /suburbs (1903-1907, 1920 England), Den-en Dofu (1915 Tokyo), and Colonel Light Gardens (1922 Adelaide). There are also idyllic residential settings in natural landscapes (1953 Tapiola, Helsinki), expatriate community housing (1910 Menteng, Indonesia), depression era social housing (1930s Greenbelt, Maryland) and the youngest example: the neo-traditional resort haven, Seaside (1985 Florida). The authors make the case that conservation efforts ‘succeed best when they build on foundational planning principles, address landscape, architecture, social engineering together and respect the spirit of the place’ (cover text).
The scholarly discussion for each example is exemplary with good histories of each site and careful discussions of the changes to both the physical environment, the residential make up and governance over time. Illustrations are well chosen, with some coloured plates. It would have been wonderful to see even more illustrations, given the quality of the sites and case studies. Even though each chapter is by a different author, the book is well edited and is consistently easy to read. The introduction and the two concluding chapters provide good context to the case studies and tease out the successes from the poorer outcomes.

In this otherwise excellent book, the use of the word ‘iconic’ throughout the book felt clichéd and ‘iconicity’ did not assist the discourse. Isabelle Gournay defends the terminology: ‘It is true that “icon” has become a buzzword and “iconic” a substitute for “famous”’ (p.436). She uses the definition of a ‘person or thing...considered worthy of admiration or respect’ (p.436-7). She argues that a ‘planned community...can be deemed iconic from various physical, social or symbolic perspectives’ (p.437). She makes a case that a presentation or photograph for a given planned community has often become a representative symbol of its visual and social characteristics, the bird’s eye views of New Lanark being one such enduring image, and that many of these sites, like Greenbelt, were intentionally presented to be ‘iconic’. These planned communities were intended to be model examples, that is literally icons to be emulated. However, could they also be described as planned communities of cultural significance? Their significance, including the significance of their published images against various values could then be established. This may be applying terminology from the Burra Charter, and an Australian lens to the subject, but would avoid, or simply reduce, the clichéd use of the word ‘iconic’, possibly avoid ‘iconicity’ entirely, and thus provide some further nuance to the discussion.

The book will be of great interest to urban designers, town planners, social planners, architects, and landscape architects, and anyone either designing new communities or working in the conservation or ongoing management of planned communities.

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**Geelong’s Changing Landscape: Ecology, Development and Conservation**

Editors: David S Jones and Phillip B Roös  
Publisher: CSIRO Publishing, 2019  
ISBN: 9780643103603  
Review by: Kim Burrell MA (University of Melbourne); Cultural Heritage (Deakin University)  
University Archivist, Victoria University

This book is a considered and engaging study of Geelong’s environmental, urban, cultural, and social history. The editors have gathered contributions from a variety of academic and professional disciplines and perspectives to produce a publication that is timely, cogent and profoundly relevant. Its great strength is that it embodies a collaborative editorial approach, reflected in the stories and analyses it presents to create a text that has relevance beyond its regional scope.

*Geelong’s Changing Landscape: Ecology, Development and Conservation* is carefully organised with an introduction that articulates and considers the region’s environmental history and ecology, and how these have been changed over time by human interaction with the natural environment. While the book may focus on a particular region, early chapters establish a narrative about the environment that is far wider. This is supported by three distinct parts. In an overarching introduction, ‘Geelong: Djilang—a tapestry of histories, voices and ecologies’ the editors state clearly that they intend the book to

... instigate a discussion about where is Geelong going, and the need for us to make wise, culturally and ecologically sensitive decisions and judgements about this direction so as not to destroy that which we hold so valuable as representing the essence of this place, this landscape, this Country. (Jones & Roös 2019, p. 5).
Part 1 explores in three chapters, the environmental history of the Geelong region from a variety of perspectives, in terms of natural, cultural and social contexts, ranging from the geological formation of its landscape to postcolonial development. As a whole these chapters demonstrate how intricately the present day landscape is linked to all that has gone before. Carr’s chapter on pre-European vegetation presents an ecological history of the Geelong area (Carr 2019). It is written with engaging enthusiasm for his subject and represents meticulously documented research, embracing an array of information in a variety of formats. As well, Carr looks to the future of the ecological landscape on a broader geographical scale, articulating a strong case for science to adopt stronger moral and ethical leadership that, as is this book’s strength, engages with other academic disciplines:

We find ourselves, morally and ethically, on a precarious path and must do better. It is neither too late nor too hard to protect what we have left and to restore, if and where appropriate, with all actions based on scientific data and input from multiple sources and disciplines. (Carr 2019, p. 37)

Chapter 4 is written by Uncle Bryon Powell and Tandap David Tournier (to whom the book is dedicated) with the editors (Jones & Roös eds, 2019 pp. 44-84). ‘Welcome to Wadawurrung Country’ relates in great detail ecological beginnings, explaining the different perspectives of the landscape’s first inhabitants with those of Western science and colonisers, profoundly highlighting the extent to which indigenous understandings are supported by evidence-based science.

In Part 2, four papers each deal with separate, ecological elements of the Geelong region and its ecological history with regard to vegetation, waterways, and marine and coastal environments, to comprehensively describe the region’s natural history. Trengove’s (Jones & Roös eds, 2019, pp. 125-135) detailed description of the ways the vegetation has changed with the intervention of European settlement reflects the scope of this book, embracing research and evidence gathered from a variety of traditional scientific resources along with personal communications, historical sources, and the visual arts. This is complemented by Murphy’s (Jones & Roös eds, 2019, pp. 136-154) fine focus on the Bellarine Peninsula’s earliest ecological history, highlighting the interdependence of native plantings before early European settlement.

Part 3 looks most closely at the development of the region’s social, cultural and industrial landscape now and towards its future. Drawing on its history of industrial heritage and associated population growth, it poses principles for social and environmental adaptation facing growing, coastal communities at the same time, concurrently presenting Geelong as a microcosm in a broader context.

In every respect the editors and contributors take a holistic, multidisciplinary approach to the heritage, conservation, revitalisation, development of the natural, built, and social environment. Much of what is most interesting in this book is its broad and creative approach in challenging traditional understandings of concepts of ‘landscape’, as reflected by Keeney and O’Carroll (Jones & Roös eds, 2019, pp. 261-267):

Landscape as a microcosm has a strange way of smacking us over the head from time to time ... It is this sentiment that needs to re-enter landscape design and urban planning. (Keeney & O’Carroll 2019, p. 261)

The breadth of the voices, stories, theories presented in these papers is the key to this book’s interest and integrity. Not only is it a thorough account of the way Geelong has developed environmentally, socially, and culturally, but it is also an invaluable professional and educational resource that encompasses salient considerations for future development planning in the face of today’s natural and cultural challenges. Its strength is its meticulous and broad-reaching research and the quality of the work it gathers, underpinned by an ethical approach, thorough knowledge and respect for the region and its inhabitants over time.

References

Gariwerd: an environmental history of the Grampians

Author: Benjamin Wilkie
Publisher: CSIRO Publishing, 2020
ISBN: 9781486307685
Review by: Steve Brown, Honorary Associate, The University of Sydney

Benjamin Wilkie’s book is a history of more than 20,000 years of human-environmental interaction in and around Gariwerd (The Grampians) in central western Victoria, Australia. The book describes and examines Aboriginal history—from the deep past to the present (Chs 2 & 7) and provides an account of colonisation from the 1830s until the declaration of the Grampians National Park in 1984 (Chs 3-6). The writing is in plain English and the book is aimed at a wide readership. Wilkie is an historian, writer and academic based in the town of Hamilton, in close proximity to Gariwerd.

Internationally, ICOMOS is currently engaged with bettering the integration of natural and cultural heritage, via the Nature-Culture Journey, a project being undertaken in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Thus, I read Gariwerd with an eye to seeing how environmental history—‘the study of environments, humans, and their interactions over time’ (p. ix)—might contribute to this global project. Wilkie frames the book with the question: what is the nature of Gariwerd? He responds to this question by ‘explaining’ the environment of Gariwerd (Ch. 1), describing and accounting for human interactions with the environment, and exploring how humans have (radically) changed the environment. The material presented in the book is well researched and the chronological narrative works well; but, to my mind, it does not satisfactorily integrate science and history, nature and cultures. These topics are adeptly covered alongside one another, rather than integrated or blended. I think this speaks to the difficulty and challenges of nature-cultures integration in presenting place-based histories, rather than being a critique of Gariwerd.

I found the book to be an engaging read, although, by its end, I felt deeply saddened and disturbed. Stories of reprisals and killings, massacres, e.g. the Whyte brothers’ massacre of a Jardvadjali clan in 1841 (pp. 65-66), pastoral invasion, dispossession and treatment of Aboriginal peoples, the horrors capitalist-colonial society inflicted on peoples and environments, landscape devastation, and contemporary denial of Traditional Custodian’s rights to Country infuse Wilkie’s narrative. They are simultaneously dreadful and powerful. While such histories are common to all parts of modern Australia, they never cease to shock.

The story of more than 22,000 years of Aboriginal settlement and occupation of Gariwerd is well presented (Ch. 2). The material draws from primary historical sources (colonial explorer, settler, Aboriginal protector, and newspaper archives), as well as from contemporary analyses and research, particularly the work of historian Ian Clark, and archaeologists Ben Gunn, Caroline Bird and David Frankel. Actual Aboriginal voices are rarely used, in contrast, for example, with Gib Wettenhall’s The people of Gariwerd (1999). Wilkie’s account provides insightful descriptions of pre- and early-contact Djwurrung and Jardvadjali language groups and societies (whose Countries incorporate Gariwerd). I found the section on ‘biocultural and ecological knowledge’ (pp. 27-36) to be particularly informative, including material on Aboriginal plant cultivation/agriculture and associated fire use.


The story of ‘pastoral invasion’ is one of the most confronting. Chapter 4, ‘Dispossession and environmental transformation’, covers the period 1830s-1840s when introduced epidemics spread through local Aboriginal groups and the first wave of colonial usurpation took place (1840-1851). Wilkie describes how ‘the stealing of livestock by Jarndwadjali and Djab wurrung people, which inflicted economic damage on the pastoralists … was followed by violent reprisals’; and was a theme ‘re-enacted across the region at various scales’ (p. 61). The ‘grim legacy’ of colonial invasion resulted in Jarndwadjali and Djab wurrung populations being reduced, by 1845 by 70%-80%, from an estimated 4,500-8,500 people (p. 24), of which ‘a quarter had been shot by the colonists’ (p. 68).

The story of environmental change and degradation is additionally confronting (Ch. 5). These impacts were associated with pastoralism and agriculture (including tobacco growing), the profound alteration of water systems within Gariwerd, forestry operations that extended over 150 years, as well as recreation and tourism. There was also a short and intensive period of goldmining, a consequence of which was the loss of extensive evidence of Aboriginal aquaculture in the areas around Duwul [Mount William]. From an environmental perspective, I was left wondering how many more years of landscape ‘exploitation’ are needed before ‘restorative’ land management practices become the norm (and here I am thinking of Charles Massy’s wonderful book, Call of the Reed Warbler [2017]).

Chapter 6 provides a fascinating account of the formation of the Grampians National Park in 1984, the culmination of 75 years of campaigning and conflict. In addition to my feelings of sadness, the book did give some hope for an optimistic future for Gariwerd. Ownership by Traditional Custodians and joint management of the ‘Greater Gariwerd Landscape’ is a distinct possibility, and thus the opportunity for this Aboriginal Country to become a beacon for Aboriginal healing, truth telling and reconciliation, caring for Country, teaching, learning, employment, and respect for contemporary Aboriginal culture. But, then, I am by nature an optimist.