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Review: The Code of the City: Standards and the Hidden Language of Place Making

By Eran Ben-Joseph

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Eran Ben-Joseph. *The Code of the City: Standards and the Hidden Language of Place Making*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005. 256 pp. ISBN: 0-262-02588-4 (trade cloth); US\$60.00.

Eran Ben-Joseph's recently published text entitled *The Code of the City: Standards and the Hidden Language of Place Making*, aims to answer questions about the origins and diffusion of design standards, performance and outcome, and design standards' implications for transformation and opportunities. Ben-Joseph discusses the American place-making mode and leads us to a broader understanding of the impacts of standards and codes on urban development. More importantly, the author not only clearly and powerfully presents arguments and analyses, but also describes the factors that played a major role in standards development and how professions such as land surveying shaped urban form. Both in style and substance, Ben-Joseph's work is provocative, challenging and insightful.

To demonstrate how standards have contributed to the shaping of the neighborhoods, cities, and natural landscape, the author uses many examples from different countries to emphasize that we should look at the cultural differences and the circumstances of a plan's norm to determine what is appropriate to be built and designed, instead of adhering to the vision of an ideal average and social homogenization. Ben-Joseph proceeds over several chapters to address the impact of technological choices on planning practice and landscape, and indicates that countless landowners who care more about sale returns than the community's future have planned our cities. Last, the author emphasizes that the failure to think in community terms and to appreciate that the city is a physical thing involves losses that the future cannot repair.

While Ben-Joseph certainly has accomplished his purpose of searching out and revealing an important aspect of the evolution and roles of rules and codes used by societies to create and transform their surrounding physical fabric, it would have been helpful to define the concept of "code" as used in the book. Different codes are mentioned throughout the book, including genetic code in the biology sciences, the International Code Council, the Sewage Disposal Code, the International Zoning Code, the International Urban-Wildland Interface Code, the Uniform Building Code of 1927 and

transect-based codes. Perhaps, if the author indicated more precisely what he considered to be building codes (local laws, the law of the land, and/or legal documents that are primarily written to govern new construction), this book might garner more attention from readers in various fields. Additionally, many pictures and illustrations are hard to read; however, that could be due to the condition of the original image or the result of diminution

The Code of the City: Standards and the Hidden Language of Place Making may not be easy for college or even graduate students to sit down and enjoy for hours at a time. Nevertheless, given its content, it is a must-read for architects and decision makers interested in the history and future of American planning and designing.

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