

*Partnerships in urban property development*. Nigel Dubben and Brendan Williams. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 254 pages, ISBN: 978-1-4051-1179-9. £39.99 (paperback)

*Partnerships in urban property development* aims to 'cover partnerships in the broadest sense', thereby moving beyond the better researched and highly-structured public-private partnerships (PPPs) to other 'partnerships', for example between developers and landowners, and between developers and financiers. This is an interesting approach, and sets the publication apart from others in the field. There are also strengths in the approach of reviewing partnership approaches in different countries, specifically Britain and Ireland, with a chapter summarising broader international partnership trends. Care has been taken to incorporate reflections on the impact of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) on property development partnerships, particularly in chapter 9 which examines the 'economic background and future trends'. Writing in the middle of the GFC it is hard to make a final assessment of the full implications, though the authors make a good start.

The book is written from the perspective of the two countries in which the authors are based, with Nigel Dubben at Kingston University in England and Brendan Williams at University College Dublin, though this may not be clear to a casual reader. For example, chapter one launches into a discussion of the nature of partnerships without mentioning the country from which the examples are given - only a reference to the election of a Labour Government in 1997 hints that this chapter is about Britain. The balance between the two countries does not work well either. Ireland is covered in a fascinating and well written case study in chapter five of the range of different types of development partnerships used in Dublin since the 1980s. By contrast, British experience is limited to a comprehensive discussion of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) in chapter four, an important scheme but only part of the wider partnership story. What is lacking is, for example, a contrast of urban

partnerships in Dublin with a similar sized city in Britain (say Manchester), or a contrast between the use of development corporations in both countries. There is much good description of Dublin and PFIs, though little attempt to contrast approaches in Britain and Ireland. It would be useful to have an analysis of the similarities and differences in urban property development between the two countries, and suggestions as to why these occurred.

The book is at its best when building on the practical insights of the authors. Williams has been involved in a number of consultancy projects, and Dubben held senior roles in developer organisations from the 1970s to 1990s. Sadly, however, the book suffers from what might be seen as a lack of partnership working between the authors. There is no clear structure to the publication, and very limited continuity between the chapters which make it feel more like a collection of essays. There are also contrasting approaches in topics and writing styles. In chapter one, a dense ten page theoretical section covers concepts of state power from Hobbes' *Leviathan* to pluralism and regime theory. This section stands in marked contrast to, and has few connections drawn with the rest of the book which concentrates on case studies and practical guidance for developers. For example, chapter three adopts a text-book approach to development appraisal techniques and chapter six discusses financial appraisal techniques. Both these 'practical' chapters cover ground well detailed in numerous development textbooks, and have little connection to the partnerships theme of the book. Again, the different authorship stands out. Chapter six guides the reader through complex financial techniques assuming a basic level of knowledge. In Chapter three, readers without development appraisal modelling skills may flounder if they don't know their S-curve from their NPV. It is unhelpful in chapter three to neither explain technical terms, nor describe the workings of complex development models included as figures but which sit in splendid isolation from the main text.

If a strength of the book is the broad definition of 'partnerships', it is a weakness that the range of partner types discussed is narrow. Contemporary partnerships involve a complex web of partners, including non-profit organisations and various devolved branches of government. The 'public sector' is often represented by a range of bodies, not all of which act with the same objectives - local and national government for example may have conflicting values and approaches. In Britain, non-profit housing associations play a major role in social housing transformation through PFIs. Most urban regeneration projects involve a range of community groups and local stakeholders, either formally or informally. From this reviewer's own observation, an important factor in the success or otherwise of partnerships is the inter-relationship between the various partners. These are often complex, tense and change over time as staff move or the policy and financial environment shifts. Partnership relationships are rarely touched on in the book, except in the Dublin chapter which captures a dynamic picture of partnership evolution over time.

Writing this review from overseas, the weakest section of the book is clearly the 15 pages of chapter eight on 'international trends'. The approach is to report on practice in Britain and Ireland then glimpse over the parapet to the rest of the European Union and, in a single page, to the rest of the world. This would be valid if the two countries in the study were the epicentre of PPP innovation, though it is not established in the book that they are. International learning and knowledge transfer, through the growth of multi-national companies and shared ideas of the role of the state are important concepts that could have been explored. Even in the analysis of European Union PPPs on pages 230 and 231, there is little attempt to explain the much higher percentage of partnership activity as a proportion of GDP in Portugal (over 1.2%) and the UK (over 0.6%) compared to France, the Netherlands and Germany (all under 0.1%). If the views of state power from chapter one are relevant, perhaps this is where the theme could be explored to explain different approaches between countries.

'Partnerships in urban property development' opens the debate on the broad range of partnership arrangements, both more and less structured, though may leave the reader wanting more. There is a particular need for more city region case study work, even (perhaps) an accessible theoretical background. Unfortunately much energy of the book is taken with a patchy coverage of generic development techniques. Therefore the whole is somewhat less than the sum of the parts. However, if only for the chapters on Dublin and Britain's PFI, the book has moved knowledge forward.

Tony Gilmour

University of New South Wales