

The Safe City: Safety and Urban Development in European Cities. By Leo Van Den Berg, Peter M. J. Pol, Giuliano Mingardo and Carolien J. M. Speller, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006. 334 pages. £60.00 (Hardback)

The Safe City's main thesis revolves around the evolution of how 'actual safety' and 'perceived safety' within cities have affected socio-economic well being. The book approaches this aim by comparing eleven European cities with respect to the role of security in urban development in the twenty-first century as well as its local policy implications. Far from being a book about the theoretical implications of urban safety in the twenty first century city, it instead outlines a quantitative agenda as the basis for testing the research question(s) that Van Den Berg et al pose; namely, how does the perception of a city (or part of a city) regarding safety affect the social and economic health of that city and what policy measures can be implemented. This in turn makes *The Safe City* an informed piece of work that may have much to say to policy makers, students and scholars involved in urban safety agendas. If the questions posed in *The Safe City* stay within the realm of teasing out quantitative data in order to arrive at some type of synthesis regarding 'safety' and 'the urban' then the book succeeds. If, however, the book's main aim is to add to the literature on this rather large and complex topic by attempting to get at the notion of a 'sense of safety' with regard to the urban - as someone like Jane Jacobs tries to do in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) - then this book fails to answer those types of question.

The Safe City analyses the questions posed about perceived versus actual safety in cities through the use of what the authors term their SAP model (perceived **S**ecurity, Urban **A**tractiveness and spatial behaviour, **P**olicy reactions). They use the model to analyze the 'situation and developments of actual and perceived security and related policy measures in eleven European cities' (p 265): Rotterdam, Antwerp, Glasgow, The Hague, Helsinki, Heerlen, Leeds, Bari, Birmingham, Gera and Prague. All eleven cities were selected through participation in an EU-funded SecurCity network.

With regard to the area of Perceived security, being the first area of the SAP model, the authors found that there exists an increasing gap between actual and perceived safety. Through the use of Eurostat data (2004) and data from the

Urban Audit (2004) they outline a link between three factors and an increasingly 'deteriorating security perception' (p 276): political revolution, lack of economic perspectives and media attention. With regard to Urban Attractiveness and Spatial Behaviour, the second area in the SAP model, they outline three domains that delineate perception: areas to live and work, areas to visit, and areas to move to. Within all three domains the economic attractiveness, vitality of the city centre and crime perception were all mentioned as affecting migration patterns and thus affecting 'spatial behaviour'. Policy reactions, being the last component of the SAP model, are viewed as measures that have been implemented by local actors in order to either revitalize or reorient certain parts of the city. Here the authors point to three types of measures that can be undertaken: repressive, preventive and proactive. These three types of policies are meant to encourage growth through the lifting of exogenous and endogenous problems that the local community might be facing with respect to certain areas of the city (actually or perceptually).

With regard to comparison benchmarks, the book has outlined an ambitious scale of comparative research dealing with a large body of subject matter that includes psychology, criminology, population dynamics, global instability and fear of terrorism; all with respect to the role of (and the effects to) the urban environment. The problem here, and the authors acknowledge this problem, is the lack of comparable international data due to the difference in data input and output. In other words a standardized international means of comparison with respect to the recording of perceived safety and actual safety does not exist. Although some case studies are more informative than others certain results are quite useful when testing the notion of perceived versus actual safety in the selected cities, thus helping the overall aim of the book. For instance, according to their research, Helsinki is the least safe city with respect to recorded crimes per 1,000 inhabitants, contradicting common perceived notions of Helsinki of it, more or less, being one of the safest cities in Europe.

Although the book is filled with secondary data meant to outline its research agenda, it also (perhaps intentionally) brings to the fore the problem of data availability with regard to large geographic areas of comparison; especially international ones and especially in a policy context. This makes the usefulness of more locally specific types of research regarding perceived versus actual safety in cities clear to the reader (see: Schroeder et al 1984; McDaniels et al 2006; Greenberg et al 1982). This type of research agenda however is not the

aim of the book, instead what we as readers of *The Safe City* get is a book that is rich in international EU funded data regarding questions of safety within cities and policies, meaning that the aims are more policy driven as opposed to straight forward. This ends up working in the authors' favour since the problems outlined at the start of *The Safe City* do not have straight forward answers.

The book neatly adds to existing work on urban safety by providing a consolidation of information regarding eleven cities in the EU. This ends up being quite useful as it attempts to negotiate the terrain between theoretical limitations and data driven ones. Although the research agenda is ambitious and the number of comparisons that can accurately be made are lower than one would like regarding criteria measures and possible benchmarks, this body of work will help anyone interested in EU policy driven agendas and policy areas in general regarding the notion of urban safety and the plethora of aspects that interconnect with it, directly or indirectly cause it and are directly or indirectly affected by it.

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