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Book Review

Review of Kaplan, Matthew, Leng Leng Thang, Mariano Sanchez and Jaco Hoffman, eds. *Intergenerational Contact Zones: Place-based Strategies for Promoting Social Inclusion and Belonging*. New York: Routledge. 2020. pp. 332. Price: \$165.81 (Hardcover); \$55.26 (Paperback); \$49.73 (eBook).

Meghan Joy

Concordia University
meghan.joy@concordia.ca

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I am writing this review during a cold Montreal winter and the pandemic has been raging, both keeping many of us indoors. For almost a year now, we have been out of contact with the places and people we love. This has been a time of reckoning in many ways, one of which is with rampant ageism in the form of neglect for the care of older adults: We must come to terms with why this profound dehumanization has occurred, and we must grieve. We must also imagine new paradigms of community and institutional care, of living, relating, and organizing that challenge loneliness and political apathy. This edited volume invites such an imagining through the concept and practice of Intergenerational Contact Zones (ICZs). Its 27 chapters offer short bursts of playfulness and creativity. The case studies of ICZs provoke much needed information-sharing and mutual learning for practitioners, community-builders, policymakers, planners, designers, and researchers across boundaries and borders. It is a timely and generative read, offering tangible insights for various audiences currently imagining and building those intergenerational communities and societies many of us desperately want and need.

The editors, each immersed in the practice and theory of intergenerational place-making, conceptualize ICZs in the introduction to the volume, urging readers already convinced of the importance of intergenerational programs to think more fully about how the settings in which these programs occur both deepen and sustain intergenerational encounters. Under the flag of the ICZ conceptual framework, Kaplan, Thang, Sanchez, and Hoffman challenged chapter contributors to examine existing intergenerational programs through a “psycho-socio-techno-spatial” (2) lens. More concretely, they invited the authors to identify in their own fieldwork and practice how eight varying “physical, temporal, psychological (perceptual, cognitive, and psychosocial), sociocultural, political, institutional, virtual, and ethical” (6) dimensions can prompt and facilitate regular contact, understanding, and mutuality across generations.

The book is divided into five thematic subsections (community life, parks and recreation, education, residential and family, and socio-political contexts). Throughout these sections, the reader learns how seemingly ordinary and everyday spaces—a museum, a bus stop, a community garden, a beach, a barn, a library, an urban park, a rooftop, a university campus, a housing community—can be transformed into meaningful places that are socially informed and negotiated, leading to richer and more consistent

intergenerational encounters. Sometimes such encounters occur in pre-existing but artificially transformed anchor institutions, and sometimes zones of contact are built from scratch. Either way, we learn that ICZs must be designed in a way that is both participatory and generationally informed, as well as intentional and fluid, as learning happens in situ. Several chapters (2, 4, 10, 22) highlight how an intersectional approach to generational knowledge is also crucial; disclosing spaces of culture and heritage in societies with colonial histories and past and present socio-political conflict can be both harmful and healing. As ICZs offer opportunities for each participant to sit with their own generational intelligence and trauma as well as that of others, their design requires careful ethical consideration.

Other chapters examine different practices and objects through an intergenerational lens, offering generative insights for how to place these materials—such as the Japanese teapot (Chapter 18), open fire cooking in South Africa (Chapter 2), and the Palestinian olive tree (Chapter 22)—at the centre of intergenerational pursuits. Material culture draws the authors' attention to the revival of traditions, indigenous economies, and access to food placed at risk by capitalism and geo-political conflict.

Most of the book's chapters end with practical takeaways and speak to the ways in which varying dimensions of the ICZ framework foster intergenerational place-making. The final methods section of the book (256) is particularly helpful for readers working to create and sustain intergenerational settings. A core teaching is that participation is foundational to the process of mutual belonging, respect, and meaning-making central to intergenerational place-making and is a never-ending pursuit. Facilitating participation requires a deep awareness of the goals of the intergenerational project and of the context of the project and the populations in question. Chapter 23 operates from these principles and presents a toolkit for when and how to use tools like design charettes, oral histories, and mapmaking as blueprints for creative intergenerational action.

However, certain contextual elements that are not so favorable to ICZs or that have the potential to co-opt aspects of the movement to prevent its future flourishing are marginal throughout the text. Neoliberal ideologies and material practices treat older adults as a costly 'problem,' children and youth as future labourers and consumers engaging in 'self investment' behaviour, and the middle-aged as labourers and caregivers for all (Joy 2021). Juggling these expectations across the life course can make life a drag as generations struggle for constant self-improvement and self-sacrifice. Rarely do contributors of this book mention the potential of such intergenerational programming to place even more of these demands onto individuals, to remediate and legitimate cuts to collective care and provisioning. ICZs require significant and sustained public investment in education and care across the lifecycle, in libraries, museums and parks, in bicycle and accessible transit infrastructure, and in public health care, rather than in exploratory pilot programs that are never extended. ICZs—and the philosophies that motivate them—must engage in immanent critique of the role that they play in the de-institutionalization of care and the optimism placed on non-state alternatives.

As Chapter 5 on intergenerational cycling zones notes, we must also change the intention of activities in cities from purely functionalist movement to the joy of being out and about in space, at a leisurely pace. An intergenerationally inclusive attunement to space, thus, also requires 'space' for 'time' and 'time off.' Chapter 7, on Chinese urban parks, for example, highlights the importance of places both inside and outside the city that enable relaxation in nature, while resisting over-programming and development (83). This, and other chapters such as the one on Australian pools and beaches (Chapter 21), speak to how urban entrepreneurialism and real estate speculation limit the availability of public space and investment needed to create ICZs.

While the book clearly advocates for interdisciplinarity in academic research and in practice to build ICZs, politics and policy are addressed more rarely. Chapter 20 on Japan's Multigenerational Cyclical

Support System is most insightful here, highlighting intricate ways in which national and municipal policy has jointly promoted intergenerational community in urban space. In this case, a national policy supports municipalities to incorporate “. . . services such as medical care, home- and community-based long-term care, preventative services, and livelihood supports . . . in an integrated manner in the community for the elderly to live in the community” (218). Further analysis on policy agenda setting, design, and implementation in this case and others would offer crucial insights for policymakers on how to institutionalize and resource ICZs more fully.

We learn through the chapters that spaces must be designed, planned, and programmed through ICZ concepts, which should be taught in policy, planning, and architecture. I urge practitioners and academics from these disciplines to read this book and contribute to core learnings on the physical, political, and institutional components of the ICZ framework. This will also mean addressing bureaucratic siloes that might challenge co-location in schools or care homes or result in age-friendly indoor places located in inaccessible outdoor environments. Aligning ICZs with the age-friendly program is an interesting avenue for movement-building here as strategies, plans, and toolkits have been produced to support “aging in place without isolation” (300). As Chapter 6 on re-imagining bus stops to include intergenerational virtual games—such as electronic chess—notes so playfully, ICZs have the potential to make age-friendly more “age-fun” (71). This must challenge the privatization of public space where many such transit stops are wrapped around with private advertising. We should all have a right to play, as we should have the right to restful, quiet, and leisurely places and paces. This is the kind of world I want to play a part in building!

References

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